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ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN, LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT CONFISCATES THOUSANDS OF ILLEGAL SYNTHETIC DRUGS IN LOCAL STORE BUSTS

Centralia, Pinckneyville Retailers Put on Notice

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced that undercover busts this week netted nearly 3,000 packages of synthetic marijuana with a street value of more than \$58,000 from retail establishments in two southern Illinois cities as part of her ongoing "Operation Smoked Out."

"The rising use of synthetic drugs among teens and young adults is alarming," Madigan said. "My office is working all across the state with local police, sheriff departments and prosecutors to keep these potentially deadly drugs out of stores."

Centralia

Centralia police officers joined investigators from the Attorney General's office Thursday in the sweeps to determine if retailers were selling banned synthetic marijuana products. In all, 2,026 packages worth a street value of \$42,459 were confiscated.

"The Centralia Police Department appreciates the assistance received from Attorney General Madigan in helping us combat the widespread use and availability of synthetic drugs in our area," said Chief Larry Evans. "The products are difficult to address using traditional law enforcement efforts. By partnering with the Attorney General, we feel we will be successful in ultimately eliminating this problem."

Investigators visited four Centralia locations during the operation:

- Speed Express, 609 E. 15th St. – 456 packages relinquished;
- Centralia Liquors, 634 S. Poplar – 59 packages relinquished;
- Lincoln Liquors, 731 E. Broadway – 19 packages relinquished;
- Bargain Alley, 1413 E. Elm St. – 1,492 packages relinquished.

Pinckneyville

Pinckneyville Police and Attorney General investigators confiscated an additional 893 products from two retail locations:

- Handi Mart, 711 W. Water St. – 113 packages relinquished;
- T. J. Liquors, 7 E. Parker – 780 packages relinquished.

The street value of the products seized in Pinckneyville is \$16,009.

"Pinckneyville can't fight this scourge alone," Police Chief John Griffins said. "We are grateful to Attorney General Madigan for her efforts and for making her personnel available to assist our department."

This week's activities follow sweeps that were conducted late last year at retailers in Adams, Bond and Vermilion counties, where nearly 2,000 packages of synthetics were confiscated. To date, Operation Smoke Out has removed from store shelves nearly 4,900 packages of Schedule 1 substances with an estimated street value of more than \$100,000.

Synthetic drug abuse is on the rise, with Poison Control Centers across the country noting a dramatic increase in calls about synthetic marijuana and "bath salts," another type of synthetic drug that contains chemical compounds that mimic the effects of

cocaine or methamphetamine. In 2010, Poison Control Centers nationwide received 2,915 calls related to synthetic marijuana use. That figure jumped to 6,890 calls in 2011. Reports of bath salts were made 303 times to Poison Control Centers in 2010. A year later, the centers received 6,072 calls about bath salts.

Also Thursday, Madigan's office met with area prosecutors and law enforcement officials from the offices of Clinton County Sheriff Mike Kreke, Marion County Sheriff Jerry DeVore, Jefferson County Sheriff Roger Mulch and Washington County Sheriff Charlie Parker to discuss the dramatic increase use of these products present.

States, including Illinois, initially responded to the rise of synthetic drug use by passing laws that banned specific formulas of synthetic marijuana and bath salts. Drug makers attempted to sidestep these laws by replacing the banned chemicals with new formulas. A new Illinois law that went into effect on Jan. 1 takes a broader approach and bans all chemicals that are structural derivatives of the previously-banned chemicals.

In November 2011, Attorney General Madigan hosted the first-ever statewide emergency summit to help increase awareness among state, county and local law enforcement officers of synthetic drug use as well as educators, health care professionals and parents.

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