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MADIGAN: 'OPERATION SMOKED OUT' INVESTIGATORS EXPOSE MAJOR SYNTHETIC DRUG SUPPLIER IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS

Sweep Begins at Litchfield Retailers, Leads to Jerseyville Wholesaler

Springfield — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today announced a major development in her ongoing "Operation Smoked Out," with the discovery last Friday of a major synthetic drug supplier to much of Central Illinois. In the course of operations in Montgomery and Jersey Counties, investigators from Madigan's office and area law enforcement agencies recovered approximately \$110,000 worth of illegal synthetic drugs.

"This is a major step forward in our efforts to stop the spread of synthetic drugs in Illinois," said Attorney General Madigan. "This distributor was pumping hundreds of thousands of dollars of illegal drugs into Central Illinois. Cutting off the supply of these extremely dangerous substances at the source is a huge victory."

An informant's tip led Madigan's investigators, Jerseyville Police, the Jersey County Sheriff's Department and the South Central Illinois Drug Task Force to William F. Brockman Wholesale Tobacco & Candy in Jerseyville, where 1,200 packages of synthetic drugs with a street value of \$42,000 were relinquished. Investigators also retrieved an additional 1,500 packages of illegal drugs, valued at \$68,000, from the home of a Brockman Wholesale employee. The wholesaler is suspected of supplying synthetic drugs to retailers from Benton to Decatur.

"We know this is not the end to these dangerous drugs, but no doubt this action will put a dent in the fight we have waged in Jersey County for a couple of years now," Sheriff Mark Kallal said.

"Synthetic drug usage is growing which represents a very dangerous threat to the young people of our area," said Jerseyville Police Chief Brad Blackorby. "We are eager to get them off the street and appreciate the combined efforts of Attorney General Madigan and our agencies."

In the course of the operation, investigators from the Attorney General's office and the Montgomery County Sheriff also obtained illegal synthetic drug products from two Litchfield retail locations:

- Clark gas station, 101 E. Union, 81 packages relinquished, valued at \$2,563.19
- Corner Liquors, 126 W. Ryder, 96 packages relinquished, valued at \$1,581.77

Synthetic drug use has become a significant problem in Illinois and across the country. In Litchfield, at least two known deaths related to synthetic drug use have occurred in just the last few months. Nationwide, calls to poison control centers have risen exponentially. In 2010, poison control centers received 2,915 calls related to synthetic marijuana use. By 2011, poison centers reported 6,890 calls about synthetic marijuana. Reports of bath salts, which are another synthetic drug type that contains chemical compounds that mimic the effects of cocaine or methamphetamine, have grown even faster. In 2010, poison centers received 303 calls about bath salts. A year later, the centers received 6,072 similar calls.

"These efforts by multiple agencies may have saved a life and the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office thanks all involved for their assistance. The proactive approach by the Attorney General's office and law enforcement is exactly what has to happen to prevent another teenager from going to the ER or worse," said Undersheriff Rick Robbins of Montgomery County.

Madigan's office has been working to raise awareness about the dangers of synthetic drug use since 2011. Last November, she hosted the first-ever statewide emergency summit, bringing together law enforcement officers, educators, health care professionals

and parents, to tackle this troubling trend. Madigan's office also has conducted numerous workshops with prosecutors and law enforcement personnel statewide to help agencies identify these substances and learn how to conduct investigations similar to Friday's operation.

Many states, including Illinois, responded to the rise of synthetic drug use by outlawing specific formulas of synthetic marijuana and bath salts. As a result, drug makers attempted to sidestep these laws by replacing the banned chemicals with new formulas. A recent Illinois law that took effect on January 1 takes a broader approach and bans all chemicals that are structural derivatives of the previously-banned chemicals.

To complement this ban, Madigan has drafted new legislation that is currently awaiting action by the Illinois Senate. House Bill 5233 targets the retail sale of synthetic drugs by defining a "synthetic drug product" as one that contains a controlled substance not regulated by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration. The bill also addresses the fact that these drugs are sold in packages with misleading labels claiming the products are legal. The bill further makes it illegal under the Illinois Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act to sell these drugs and significantly increases the penalty for selling synthetic or misbranded drugs.

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