

Fake Drugs, Real Problems

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last week I wrote about the federal government's crackdown on fake stuff: purses, shoes, DVDs and professional sports jerseys. The feds are trying to stop counterfeiters from profiting on the intellectual property rights of others. To make matters worse, the counterfeiters are using these profits to finance other criminal ventures.

Well, now the federal government is taking on a far more dangerous set of fakes: synthetic drugs.

Late last week the House of Representatives voted to ban a variety of synthetic drugs, including "spice," and "bath salts," probably the most commonly known kind. Without such a ban, these drugs can be sold legally in stores throughout the country. Sadly, abuse of synthetic drugs by teenagers is a growing epidemic.

In 1970, Congress passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act. Title II of the Act is known as the Controlled Substances Act, which serves as the U.S. drug policy under which the manufacture, importation, possession, use and distribution of certain substances is regulated.

The legislation created five schedules, or classifications, of controlled substances. Schedule I substances have the highest potential for abuse and no currently accepted medical use, and include drugs like marijuana and heroin. Conversely, Schedule V substances, like cough suppressants and anti-diarrheal medicines, have a low potential for abuse but have currently accepted medical use. The Drug Enforcement Administration and the Food and Drug Administration determine which substances are added to or removed from these schedules.

The new legislation, dubbed the Synthetic Drug Control Act, would add over 30 synthetic drugs that mimic the effects of marijuana and cocaine to Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act. Accordingly, this classification would make it illegal to manufacture or dispense these drugs. In addition, as the DEA investigates potentially dangerous drugs, the SDCA would grant the agency more authority to place temporary bans on them.

Representative Charlie Dent (R-Pa.) introduced the bill after learning that spice and bath salts were legally being sold to teenagers across the country in stores and online with little to no oversight, despite being linked to multiple deaths. In a statement, Dent said he "first learned about the dangers of new synthetic drugs after reading an email from a constituent whose son's life had nearly been destroyed by his abuse of synthetic marijuana or 'spice'." After hearing that story, Dent went on to say that, "a growing number of local residents shared with me powerful stories involving their own abuse of synthetic drugs or the destructive impact these substances have had on loved ones."

In February, Senator Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), proposed a nation-wide ban on the chemicals used in bath salts, which mimic the effect of cocaine. The DEA placed an emergency ban on these chemicals in October, identifying them as an "imminent hazard" to the public.

The bill passed by a vote of 317-98. While it seems like very positive legislation, most of the nearly 100 opponents of the bill were Democrats, who feared the measure would make it more difficult for scientists to obtain needed chemicals for medical research.

Dent claims he is "hopeful" the bill will be passed by the Senate. He indicated that he is "confident banning the sale of dangerous synthetic drugs will help save lives in communities across the United States."

I'm hoping it passes, too. In addition to the regular drugs I'm worried about my kids being exposed to, now I have to worry about a whole group of drugs that I never even knew existed.

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