

Testimony
HB 1133 – Department of Human Services
Judiciary Committee
Senator Hogue, Chairman
March 13, 2013

Senator Hogue, members of the Judiciary Committee, I am Sandy Thompson, Program Administrator of West Central Human Service Center (WCHSC) for the Department of Human Services (DHS). I am submitting this testimony to provide you an overview of the experiences the youth and adults (and their families) of WCHSC have experienced when using synthetic marijuana and bath salts.

Synthetics

Synthetic marijuana and bath salts are sometimes both referred to as "synthetics." Synthetic marijuana provides the user effects similar to that of marijuana. It is most commonly smoked. It is marketed under several different names to include Diablo, Pure Evil, Demon, and Bizarro.

Bath salts provide the user effects similar to that of amphetamines or methamphetamines. Bath salts can be smoked, snorted, swallowed or injected. Bath salts have been marketed under the names of Vanilla Sky, Pure Ivory, and Meow Meow.

Both youth and adults have been known to use synthetic marijuana and/or bath salts for their effects. Consumers have purchased synthetic chemicals in stores throughout the state of North Dakota and also via the internet.

Common effects of synthetic marijuana and bath salts

Common effects from the use of synthetics can include a rapid heart rate, increase in blood pressure, panic attacks, seizure, confusion, and hallucinations. The families of known synthetics users have identified that they have observed their loved ones become paranoid, exhibit erratic and bizarre behavior, and even become violent.

Consumer experiences

Consumers of WCHSC, and their family members, have suffered greatly and experienced much fear as a result of the use of synthetics. I have compiled a few examples of these experiences as told to us by consumers.

One evening the parents of a young man felt that their son was acting abnormal. Suspecting that he ingested some type of chemical, they took him to the emergency room of their local hospital. While there, the young man became quite agitated and was medicated. The young man admitted he had smoked synthetic marijuana. The health professionals at the hospital did what they could to calm him down so that he could be released to home with his parents. The family returned to their home at 2:00 am. The parents told the young man that they would speak to him about the night's events in the morning and that he was expected to get up for school in the morning. The next morning the son came to the kitchen table and looked at his father and said "who are you?" The father was obviously confused. Both parents were surprised to find out that the young man had smoked synthetic marijuana again that morning before coming to the kitchen table for breakfast. The young man had no memory of being at the emergency room the night before.

A young female smoked synthetic marijuana at a house party. She became quite agitated and took off all of her clothes. The police were called and she was found naked in the home of the people who were hosting the party.

A young man smoked synthetic marijuana during his lunch break from school while driving in his car. He began to hallucinate and parked the vehicle. He was found sitting on the sidewalk in the downtown area of his community. He was awake and conscious but his speech was slurred and he could not tell concerned citizens who he was. The local police were called. The parents and the police believe that the young man parked his car when he began hallucinating. The young man recalls "running and running" but was not sure why he was running. It took the local police nearly 12 hours to find the young man's vehicle which was parked about five blocks from where the youth was found.

An adult male who was a student at a local college is known to have put bath salts in a beverage and drink it. A fellow student observed the young man to look "zoned out." The young man had slurred speech and his speech was hard to understand. He was observed to be sitting in a chair in the classroom and drooling from his mouth.

On Friday January 18, 2013, I had the privilege of talking with an adult male who was willing to share his story and experience with synthetic marijuana. He admits that he has struggled with the use of many substances including synthetic marijuana. He reports that he had been smoking synthetic marijuana daily, multiple times per day, for two years. He admits to mostly using Diablo, Pure Evil, and Bizarro. His daily cost to use was about \$90 per day. Initially he was able to fund his use through wages earned from his

employment. However, when his use interfered with his employment he then stole items from stores and sold them or pawned personal possessions. He states that when he first began to smoke synthetic marijuana he would get an "adrenaline rush" that was enjoyable to him but it did not last long. He admits that he would go to the gym to work out because he had a lot of energy from his use and that he would go into the men's locker room several times during his workout to smoke more of the chemical to keep his energy level up. Not long after, he states that he no longer got the adrenaline rush from using, but that he would become severely intoxicated "like nothing else I have ever tried." He admits to having passed out from his extensive smoking, becoming frustrated with himself as he knew he was slurring his speech, and that he could not find the words he wanted to use when speaking to others. He has experienced hallucinations. At first, the hallucinations began as "whispering noises" in his ear. He thought the whispers may in fact have been from the devil. As his use progressed to multiple times per day his paranoia led him to believe that he may be the devil. He has had experiences where he has become so irritated and agitated with family members that he has ripped hair out of his head, banged his head on countertops, and exhibited violence toward a family member. He recently lost a relationship with his girlfriend related to his use. He discontinued his use of synthetic marijuana in late November 2012 because the drug was no longer readily available to him. He experienced what he calls withdrawal symptoms for nearly 30 days. The most pronounced symptoms were extreme sweating, increased heart rate, extreme memory problems, and panic attacks. This young man has a desire to return to college but fears that he has done so much damage to his body and brain that he may not be able realize that dream.

Challenges for treatment providers

Since the chemical makeup of synthetics is ever changing, it is difficult, if not impossible, to detect them via urine analysis, commonly referred to as urine drug screens.

There are no current research studies that can assist treatment providers in knowing exactly what the short term or long term effects are from the use of synthetics.

Consumers who seek behavioral health services may need additional attention when completing reading or written assignments due to problems with concentration, memory or comprehension.

Despite the challenges, we have observed youth and adults accept treatment services and enter into recovery from their substance use.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.