



Florida Office of Drug Control Update November 5, 2010

1. **NOPE Candlelight Vigil** – NOPE held its fourth Annual Candle Light Vigil to honor children who have died from drug overdoses and to raise awareness of the problem of prescription drug abuse. The main vigil was conducted in West Palm Beach on October 28th. This year's event included 49 vigil sites in 16 states. The vigil in West Palm Beach was highlighted by the presence and remarks of White House Drug Policy Director Gil Kerlikowske. It was a well-organized, solemn, moving, and uplifting event that reinforced the message that drug addiction is a complex, lifelong disease that should be acknowledged, de-stigmatized, and forthrightly addressed by our society. Special thanks to Karen and Richard Perry for their leadership and being such articulate advocates for all of us.
2. **2010 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey** – Last week, we announced the results of the 2010 Florida Youth Substance abuse Survey. The good news is that the early initiation of alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco continues to decline. Alcohol use also continues to move downward, yet Florida youth alcohol rates are still above the national average. After alcohol, our biggest challenge is the rise in the use of marijuana. The full report is available at: www.dcf.state.fl.us/mentalhealth/publications/fysas/
3. **Suicide Prevention – National Survivors of Suicide Day** -- The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's 12th Annual Survivors of Suicide Day is on November 20th, 2010. In the suicide prevention field, survivors are considered to be those who have lost a loved one to suicide. Several sites around Florida are holding conferences for survivors including: Deerfield Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Gainesville, Gulfport, Jacksonville, Largo, Lutz, Miami, Orlando, Sarasota and Tallahassee. Additional details for each conference site can be found at http://www.afsp.org/index.cfm?page_id=FEE7D778-CF08-CB44-DA1285B6BBCF366E
4. **Rx for Change Symposium** – The Palm Beach Coalition and the NOPE Task Force conducted at one-day symposium on prescription drug abuse for over 300 prevention, treatment, and law enforcement professionals in West Palm Beach. Law enforcement, medical professionals, and experts in the field made presentations highlighted by remarks from White House Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy Gil Kerlikowske.
5. **Marijuana Legalization Defeated in California** – Proposition 19, marijuana legalization, was defeated 56% to 44%. This is good news as we seek to reinforce efforts to reduce youth use of marijuana in Florida.
6. **Good Samaritan Law** – This law would hold harmless from prosecution any citizen who reports or calls for emergency medical assistance for another person suffering a drug overdose. Since many drug overdoses involve illicit drugs or the illegal nonmedical use of prescription drugs, fear of police involvement may deter or delay help-seeking in the event of an overdose. Law enforcement officials from south Florida have asked us to consider advancing a Good Samaritan law as a legislative proposal for the 2011 Session to help reduce Florida's unacceptably high number of drug overdose deaths.

7. **Synthetic Cannabis** – We continue to raise awareness among Floridians about the dangers posed by synthetic cannabis. Senator Wise is moving forward with drafting legislation to schedule K2/Spice/synthetic cannabis during the upcoming legislative session. The Lieutenant Governor wrote an editorial on synthetic cannabis and it is attached at the end of this update.
8. **Drug Policy Advisory Council** -- The council met yesterday, November 4th. Topics covered included statewide drug trends, the status of the prescription drug monitoring program, an update on the PDMP Foundation's funding raising, the Department of Correction's consolidation plan to improve treatment, the results of the 2010 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey and the case to schedule synthetic cannabinoids (Spice/K2).
9. **Transition** – The Office of Drug Control submitted a transition report for Governor-elect Scott. The Transition Report emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive drug control strategy to achieve the best taxpayer return-on-investment for a resource-strapped state. The hallmark of Florida's drug control strategy is maintaining a balanced approach (prevention, treatment, law enforcement) in combating substance abuse. We look forward to briefing the transition team on the successes we have achieved, and the challenges we still face in reducing substance abuse.
10. **Duval Prevention Coalition** – During recent visits to Duval and St. Johns counties, we have seen the excellent work communities are doing to make a difference. The Duval coalition is gathering community partners to launch its initiative to reduce underage drinking within its six health zones. In St. Johns county the coalition is seeing great success with their Be the Wall campaign and participation from the St. Johns Sheriff's increased compliance operations. Also, in both counties we had the opportunity to meet with local suicide prevention specialists who are leading community efforts to increase training on the signs and symptoms of suicide to public school faculty and staff, higher education staff, parents and other gatekeepers. In Duval County a Garrett Lee Smith Grant is helping to pay for increased training. In St. Johns County law enforcement, social service providers and health professionals met to begin addressing a rise in the number of suicides in that county.

“We learn from history that we do not learn from history.” --- Marc Bloch

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”
-- John F. Kennedy

Regards, Bruce D. Grant, Director, Florida Office of Drug Control

Spice is not Nice; The Danger in Synthetic Marijuana

By Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp

There's a drug becoming increasingly popular with teens in Florida that many parents have never heard of – and worse yet, it is legal. The drug is known as “Spice,” “K2,” or “fake weed,” and mimics the effects of marijuana.

Spice is a psychoactive, intoxicating drug that poses a real hazard to public health and public safety. This legally sold drug is laced with chemical compounds that are actually synthetic cannabinoids. Indeed, Spice was originally developed in laboratories for the express purpose of mimicking THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the main psychoactive component of the marijuana.

Spice is often sold as incense through “head shops” or over the Internet. Purveyors of this drug package it under the words, “Not for Human Consumption,” but that is exactly what people do with it. Spice looks like a pile of dried up herbs or spices-hence its name-and it is totally unregulated by the Food and Drug Administration.

Spice is also a nightmare for law enforcement because it is sold and used openly as a so-called legal alternative to marijuana. Currently there is no way to test for the use of Spice – making it that much more attractive to would-be users.

Many people may be led to believe that Spice is a safe alternative to marijuana because it is legal. Spice is, in fact, more potent and more dangerous than marijuana. Nationwide this year, poison control centers have received over 1,300 calls due to synthetic cannabinoids. In Florida, from December 2009 through October 2010, the Department of Health's Bureau of Environmental Public Health Medicine documented nearly 50 cases of synthetic cannabinoid use that have required medical intervention. These adverse events involved victims as young as age 13 with reported symptoms including vomiting, unconsciousness, depressed respiration, and altered mental states.

Spice is illegal in many European countries because it has a track record there dating back to the 1990's. Spice however remains legal in the U.S. because we have less experience with it (some Spice derivatives containing the chemical HU-210 are however treated as a controlled substance scheduled under Federal law). While the Drug Enforcement Administration does currently list five synthetic cannabinoids as “Drugs and Chemicals of Concern,” and is considering federal restrictions on Spice, 13 other states – to include three of our border states - have taken action to ban Spice products and synthetic cannabinoids.

Just two weeks ago, I was speaking with our community anti-drug organizations gathered at the annual drug prevention conference and they asked for help to stop this new drug from infiltrating their neighborhoods. I therefore look forward to the upcoming legislative session, when we will have an opportunity to enact a statewide ban that protects Florida's most vulnerable and precious resource – our youth -- from these harmful products.

Florida needs to ban this drug as soon as possible. It is harming our citizens, and there is no redeeming value in allowing it to remain legal. Let's take concerted action now, before this new drug causes more damage to our youth.