

November 1, 2011

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
2138 RHOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers
Ranking Member
House Judiciary Committee
B351 RHOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Conyers:

On behalf of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), our 30,000 members and the more than 136 million patients we treat each year, we want to reaffirm our support for H.R. 1254, the "Synthetic Drug Control Act of 2011," and the Adams Amendment.

Americans have witnessed an explosion of synthetic drug use during the past year. In 2010, there were a little less than 2,900 calls to poison control centers (PCCs) regarding synthetic marijuana exposure. Through August of this year, that number has already reached more than 4,400 calls. Last year, there were about 300 calls related to bath salts. By comparison, that number had risen to more than 4,700 by the end of August.

As emergency physicians, we witness first-hand how these dangerous synthetic drugs harm users, many times sending them to the emergency department for treatment of chest pain, elevated blood pressure, nausea, erratic heartbeat, agitation, paranoia, muscle breakdown and/or hyperthermia. These products contain chemicals that imitate the hallucinogenic or stimulant properties of marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy and methamphetamine, which often creates severe paranoia that may cause the users to harm themselves or others.

For example, there was a boy in Louisiana who snorted bath salts and spent the next few days experiencing intermittent psychotic episodes. He sliced his own throat with a kitchen knife and ultimately succeeded in committing suicide by shooting himself in the head.

There was a teen in Illinois who smoked synthetic marijuana and died when he drove his car into a house. He crashed into the bedroom of a 2-year-old, who, fortunately, was playing in the backyard at the time.

One 14-year-old Tennessee boy high on synthetic drugs had to be given 28 times a typical dose of a sedation drug so that he would be able to stay on the bed without physical restraints.

This past spring, 11 teens and young adults in Minnesota had to be rushed to hospitals after snorting a synthetic drug.

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There are many stories like these and they are occurring with alarming frequency. Unfortunately, these substances are packaged as innocuous products, such as incense, bath salts, air freshener and plant food. They are sold over the counter at convenience stores, gas stations and head shops, causing many people to falsely believe they are safe.

The easy access to, and thoughtless use of, synthetic drugs not only places their health and lives at risk, but it can have a profound impact on the ability of emergency physicians to care for their patients. When users of synthetic drugs need emergency medical attention, they are utilizing precious assets, such as ambulances, emergency department beds and health care dollars. When these scarce resources are being utilized by a synthetic drug user; they are unavailable for anyone else in the community. At one point in time, ACEP's Vice President, Dr. Alex Rosenau, had nearly 10 percent of his emergency department beds in Allentown, Pennsylvania occupied at once by bath salt users.

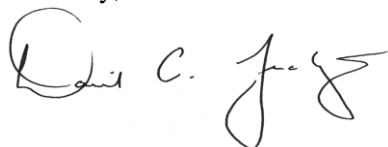
This critical issue must be addressed in two ways. First, Congress must enact H.R. 1254 with the Adams Amendment. This legislation will help limit access to these unsafe and hazardous drugs.

Second, a public campaign should be undertaken to tell Americans about the risks associated with using synthetic drugs. This epidemic has developed so quickly, there is a lag between people finding out about these drugs and understanding the inherent peril associated with their use.

As we did during the congressional briefing on this issue on September 7, 2011, ACEP stands together with the White House Office of Drug Control Policy, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to urge passage of this important legislation. For the sake of your constituents and our patients, we urge your committee to take swift action to approve H.R. 1254 and the Adams Amendment.

We look forward to working with you to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David C. Seaberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David C. Seaberg, MD, CPE, FACEP
President