

North Coastal Prevention Coalition

Combating Retail Sales of Synthetic Drugs*

August 2018

(*Nationally Recognized as the 2018 Innovative Prevention Program)

NCPC Background

The North Coastal Prevention Coalition (NCPC) has facilitated community-level prevention strategies in the north coastal region of San Diego County since 1993. Coalition efforts focus on community level changes to reduce youth access to alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other drugs and to promote positive social norms to prevent substance abuse. NCPC's mission and philosophy are committed to promoting healthy communities and positive opportunities for young people, and fostering community leadership in substance abuse prevention:

The mission of the North Coastal Prevention Coalition is to reduce the harm of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs in the cities of Carlsbad, Oceanside and Vista through community action, education, support and collaboration.

Project Overview

Using the Strategic Prevention Framework, NCPC embarked on a multi-year effort beginning in 2010 to address the new and emerging issue of synthetic drugs (specifically spice and bath salts). These products were showing up in local liquor and convenience stores, labeled 'incense' and 'bath salts,' and gaining a reputation for a way to get high without getting in trouble.

NCPC worked with partners at the local, regional, state and federal level. Initially, approaches focused on increasing public awareness, and partnering with local law enforcement agencies to urge local retail outlets to stop selling these dangerous products.

NCPC worked closely with youth coalition members who were seeing their peers and family members negatively impacted by using spice. They were trained to conduct store assessments, conduct follow up visits to speak with retailers, and develop public speaking skills to share their perspective with local officials. They were outraged when they saw firsthand that some retailers received a letter from the police chief urging them to stop selling synthetic drugs, and yet they ignored it to make money. **One retailer stated, "If you want me to stop selling, you'll have to change the law."**

Though these efforts had some success in reducing availability from corporate stores, other retailers like independent markets, liquor stores, and tobacco shops continued to profit off these products since the laws and enforcement could not keep up. After California law changed in January 2012 to prohibit the sale of synthetic cannabinoid compounds, NCPC worked with law enforcement to put retailers on notice that these products were illegal. By June 2012, most of the stores came into compliance, but four Oceanside retailers remained



Blueberry Mamba 'incense' purchased for \$14 at an Oceanside liquor store, labeled 'not for human consumption' and 'use only as directed' though no directions or ingredients were listed.



***NCPC is the proud recipient of the
2018 Innovative Substance Abuse Prevention
Programs, Practices, and Policies Award
by the National Association of
State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors**





NCPC Board President conducts media interview supporting enforcement against liquor store selling synthetic drugs (Jan 2013).

Expanding Collaboration

After a string of medical calls for service in downtown Oceanside in 2015, the business association, law enforcement, the City Attorney, and NCPC collaborated to craft a local ordinance that would give additional tools to crack down on illegal sales. Rather than focusing on a class of chemical compounds, the local ordinance addressed packaging and labeling (such as ‘not for human consumption’), and included a **\$500 fine per package** for violators. This was a critical step to eliminate these products from local stores, and resulted in a dramatic decline in calls for service – from 169 between January 2013 and November 2015, to 21 from January 2016 to August 2017.

Program Innovation

NCPC hopes that by sharing this nearly decade long issue of trying to curb synthetic drug sales, other communities can achieve success faster. Like many communities around the country, NCPC was learning along the way as the problem of synthetic drugs emerged in 2010.

The innovation most important to share with others is the adoption of a local ordinance in the City of Oceanside in April 2016 that targets the labeling and packaging of synthetic drugs with civil penalties of up to \$500 per package. This approach helps overcome the challenge of testing and identifying chemical compounds used in synthetic drugs, which are often

changed slightly to avoid federal regulations. Oceanside’s local ordinance included descriptions of the marketing, pricing, and labeling typically used with synthetic drugs in defining what would be against the law. The City and law enforcement then followed up with retailer education and compliance checks, which resulted in the virtual elimination of retail sales of synthetic drugs in our region.

We worked closely with prevention colleagues in the City of San Diego, and they also passed a local ordinance in June 2016. While San Diego’s fine is per violation, not per package, they also have seen a dramatic reduction in retail sales due to law enforcement education and compliance checks.

Sharing Resources




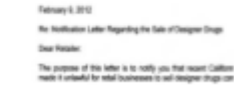


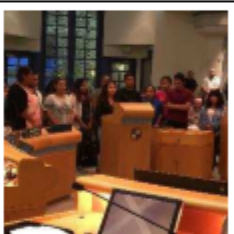

These efforts have been shared at several conferences, including CADCA’s National Leadership Forum in February 2017, and the National Prevention Network in September 2017.

Links to presentations, as well as local ordinances, can be found on NCPC’s website under Resources/NCPC-publications:

<http://northcoastalpreventioncoalition.org/resources/ncpc-publications/>

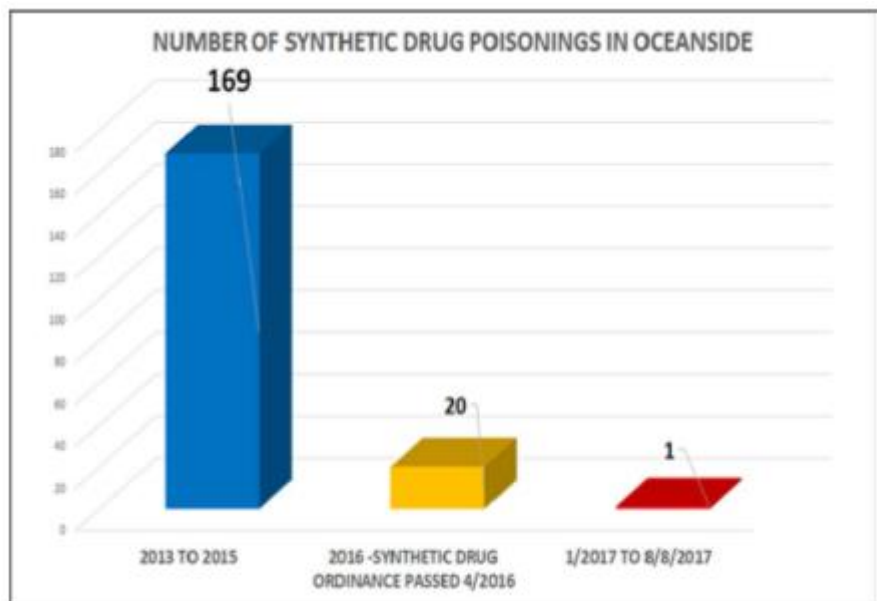


Youth advocates and organizations support introduction of local ordinance banning synthetic drug sales in Oceanside (April 2016).

NCPC Synthetic Drug Timeline		
2009-2010	First learned of spice from youth at after school program.	
2010	Conducted preliminary store assessments to check for availability; 50% (6 of 12 stores) were selling spice, including liquor stores, gas stations, and convenience stores.	
November 24, 2010	On November 24, 2010, the DEA temporarily added five chemicals to its list of Schedule I substances.	
Jan 2011	Published op-ed in local paper, "Nothing Nice in the Spice."	
2011	Conducted additional store assessments with youth and community members, and gained additional media coverage; partnered with law enforcement agencies to send letter to all retailers (nearly 250) urging them to stop sales; impacted most chain retailers but others continued to sell due to enforcement limitations. March 2011 – 12/22 stores sold (54%) July/August 2011 – 14/33 stores sold (42%) January 2012 – 11/23 stores sold (47%)	
Jan 2012	New 'spice law' took effect in California in January banning specific chemical compounds.	
Feb 2012	Partnered again with law enforcement to send another letter with a stronger message, since law now banned sales.	
June 2012	Most stores stopped selling, but about 4-6 continued, knowing that enforcement options were limited due to lack of testing resources.	
Jan 2013	A liquor store in Vista was caught selling bath salts behind the counter; partnered with ABC and Sheriff to pitch news coverage of 20 day alcohol license suspension; NCPC Board member interviewed by local news.	
2013-2015	Staff and coalition partners no longer found retail spice sales in Carlsbad or Vista. Four problem stores in Oceanside (2 head shops and 2 smoke shops) continued to sell and were reported to DEA. In December 2015, DEA conducted an enforcement operation, but penalties in State law only resulted in a fine.	
Dec 2015	Main Street Oceanside business organization contacted City to complain about homeless using spice in downtown business district.	
Jan-Apr 2016	NCPC connected Oceanside City Attorney to colleague in San Diego with expertise in synthetic drug laws; after learning more, she re-wrote ordinance to prioritize packaging more than chemical compounds, including a \$500 per packet fine for sales. Ordinance was adopted unanimously in April 2016, with broad community support coordinated by NCPC.	
Dec 2016	Worked with City staff, Oceanside Police Department (OPD), and local news outlet to do follow up story on retailer notification and enforcement efforts.	
Aug 2017	Received copy of OPD memo summarizing spice calls for service data, indicating there had only been one in the first seven months of 2017.	

Key Outcomes

Though it has taken nearly ten years, there has been significant success towards reducing the retail sales of synthetic drugs, and increasing community involvement in the issue. The most significant outcome is the dramatic decrease in calls for service related to synthetic drugs experienced in the City of Oceanside, as illustrated in the graph below.



Tri-City Medical Center

According to Tri-City Medical Center (TCMC), which serves NCPC's region, there were dramatic declines in poisonings seen in the emergency room.

The numbers in the table below represent the ICD-9 and ICD-10 diagnosis codes which include synthetic drugs.

CHKS Findings on Synthetic Drug Use

Reported use of synthetic drugs by teens is relatively low. By 2017, 98% of 11th graders students reported never having tried synthetic cannabinoids (2015 and 2017, California Healthy Kids Survey, San Diego County Custom module, Vista Unified School District.)

Students Responding "Never" having tried synthetic cannabinoids			
Year	9 th grade	11 th grade	Alternative School
2015	96%	94%	76%
2017	98%	98%	84%

Tri-City Medical Center ER Poisonings			
Year	Other Specific Drugs	Psychodys-leptics	TOTAL
2013	15	26	41
2014	27	24	51
2015	14	15	29
2016	0	0	0
2017	0	0	0

A Community Coalition Approach

NCPC recognizes that the problem of synthetic drugs has not been solved. Synthetic drugs continue to be marketed and sold, often online, or by street dealers.

In addition, with the legalization of marijuana in California in November 2016, and retail sales beginning in January 2018, NCPC is fully aware that availability and use of marijuana is likely to increase. NCPC is advocating for local policies to prevent commercialized marijuana.

Community coalitions like NCPC depend on partnerships, collaboration, and people from all sectors to take action in building safe, healthy, and drug-free communities.

Vista Community Clinic serves as the fiscal agent for NCPC grants and contracts. Funded in part by the County of San Diego, HHSA, Behavioral Health Services and by SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention through the STOP Act. For more info, please visit NCPC at www.northcoastalpreventioncoalition.org or contact Erica Leary, Program Manager, at eleary@vcc.org or 760-631-5000 x7150.