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## **GUEST COLUMN**

### ***Stopping the Spread of Synthetic Cannabinoids: Operation Targets “State of Emergency,” Results in 25 Arrests***

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Synthetic marijuana and bath salts have attracted considerable attention recently. The increasing sale and use of these illegal substances in communities across Wisconsin is concerning to state and local law enforcement. What may be most troubling are the measures undertaken by those who attempt to manufacture these synthetics – ever so slightly altering the chemical composition in an attempt to evade enforcement, prosecution and regulatory efforts.

The Wisconsin Department of Justice takes the threats posed by these synthetics seriously. The Attorney General’s Office, the Department’s Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) and the State Crime Laboratory have partnered with the state Legislature, the Wisconsin Controlled Substances Board and other local, county, state and federal officials to find solutions to these complex enforcement, investigative and regulatory issues presented by these substances.

One of the communities hit hardest by synthetic controlled substances is the Lac du Flambeau (LDF) Reservation in north-central Wisconsin. In April of this year, the LDF Tribal government declared a “state of emergency,” citing increased emergency medical calls, domestic violence, other criminal activity and a widespread perception of social degradation caused by synthetic marijuana. Something had to be done.

Fortunately, the Native American Drug and Gang Initiative (NADGI) was poised to help. Under the leadership of the Division of Criminal Investigation, NADGI represents the first and last line of defense. Several tribal law enforcement agencies – Bad River, Ho-Chunk Nation, Lac Courte Oreilles, Menominee, Oneida, Red Cliff, St. Croix, Stockbridge-Munsee and the Lac du Flambeau Police Departments -- make up the core of this inter-jurisdictional, inter-agency drug and gang task force serving Wisconsin’s Native American communities.

Seeking input from tribal communities, NADGI quickly developed a multi-pronged strategy to tackle the threat posed by synthetics. The first prong involved broad-based community outreach and awareness training. Since April, NADGI agents have trained more than 3,000 community members, tribal government leaders, educators, first responders, and other professionals on the dangers of synthetics. A productive dialogue resonated from this outreach, helping to strengthen those communities and facilitating a wave of “drug tips.” Information provided by concerned community members has helped inform and shape enforcement strategies.

*Operation Pandora*, a NADGI-led and coordinated street-level enforcement initiative, was developed specifically to target those involved in the manufacture, distribution and use of synthetic marijuana and other controlled substances in Wisconsin’s Native American communities. *Operation Pandora* culminated in late June with the execution of several search warrants and the arrest of 25 individuals in the Lac du Flambeau tribal community. This action has made a significant impact.

NADGI also worked closely with several others in the region – the sheriff’s offices in Vilas, Oneida, Price, Forest and Lincoln Counties, Wabeno and Merrill Police Departments and the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC). Without these strong law enforcement and multi-disciplinary partnerships, *Operation Pandora* would not have been nearly as successful.

While I am deeply troubled by the spread of synthetic marijuana and other illegal substances in Wisconsin, I am extremely proud of the work by DCI, NADGI and the tribal law enforcement partners who helped make *Operation Pandora* a success. I am also encouraged by the various approaches that have been undertaken through legislative and regulatory channels.

Until we have eradicated synthetics from our communities, schools, churches and parks, our public safety mission is incomplete. I am confident that the efforts of NADGI through investigations like *Operation Pandora* will send a clear message that the manufacture, distribution and use of synthetics will not be tolerated.

Please [click here](#) for downloadable photos of synthetic cannabinoids (photos unrelated to Operation Pandora). If you wish to use a photo for publication, please courtesy [Lake Winnebago Area Metropolitan Enforcement Group](#), Department of Justice – Division of Criminal Investigation.

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