

**By the Honorable TOM P. THOMPSON,
District Attorney, 15th Judicial District**

There is a new system of drug trafficking in Tennessee, and it is being carried out right in front of our eyes at convenience stores across the state. Those who are breaking the law are doing so knowingly, and I am writing today to alert you to this dangerous trend: synthetic drugs.

Synthetic drugs are illegal, and they are dangerous. Often sold in stores, some purchasers may not know that these drugs are illegal and dangerous. Across Tennessee, children and adults are having bad reactions to the changing chemicals used in these drugs.

Along with my fellow district attorneys, I am working to strengthen laws seeking to eliminate these products altogether and to prosecute individuals who continue to sell these substances. Please help us by learning more about synthetic drugs and spreading the word within our community.

How can I recognize synthetic drugs?

Synthetic drugs are often marketed in small, colorful plastic pouches—sometimes using cartoon-like images—under names like K2, Spice or Molly’s Plant Food. They can be accompanied by disclaimers such as “Not for Human Consumption” and labeled as “plant food” or “bath salts” in an attempt to mask their true use and sidestep existing laws. Some are designed to look and be smoked like marijuana while others are used more like methamphetamine.

What are the dangers of synthetic drug use? □□□□□□□□□□

The effects of these chemical-based substances—violent outbursts, hallucinations, paranoia, seizures, increased blood pressure, possible kidney failure, suicidal thoughts and more—are dangerous, and much more severe than users may anticipate. The substances are cheap,

addictive, extremely potent and easily fatal.

What are lawmakers doing to address this issue?

In the past two years as synthetic drugs have become increasingly popular, lawmakers have acted repeatedly to outlaw the latest versions of these drugs. However, producers of synthetic drugs constantly alter the chemical contents of the products to circumvent ongoing law enforcement efforts. This is precisely why Tennessee's district attorneys have continued to work on legislation that takes a big-picture approach to synthetic drugs and the many varied compounds used to produce them.

My fellow district attorneys and I supported our legislators in addressing the present shortcomings in the law. Through several bills recently signed by Gov. Bill Haslam, the penalties regarding synthetic drugs will increase whether offenders are selling, possessing or ingesting synthetic drugs. The definition of synthetic drugs will also be expanded to include all possible synthetic derivatives. These efforts will stiffen the penalties for infractions appropriately, as well as eliminate the weaknesses in the substance definition, which producers of synthetic drugs previously abused.

We have also supported dozens of undercover law enforcement stings on convenience stores throughout the state. These efforts have brought criminals to trial and resulted in the confiscation of large quantities of synthetic drugs.

As your district attorney, I will continue to work to eradicate synthetic drugs from Wilson County using the available resources. I hope you will join this effort by sharing this information with your family, friends and colleagues.

The Tennessee District Attorneys General Conference was created by the General Assembly in 1961 to provide for a more prompt and efficient administration of justice in the courts of this state. It is composed of the district attorneys general from the state's 31 judicial districts.

Editor's Note: The 15th Judicial District includes Wilson, Trousdale, Smith, Macon and

Jackson Counties.