

Emerging Drugs: Building Awareness Within Formations

By Captain Erinn Singman-Kaine

Increased incidents of drug use throughout our Army installations cause concern for the welfare of our Soldiers and families. Specific drugs of interest include *Salvia divinorum* (or simply *Salvia*), Spice, a cocaine-like substance sold as Bath Salts and, most recently, Devil Tracks:

- *Salvia*, an herb, is currently listed as a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) “drug of concern.”
- Spice, a synthetic cannabinoid, was recently placed on the DEA temporary list of controlled substances.
- Bath Salts and Devil Tracks contain analogs of illegal substances.

Changes in psychosis among those who use these substances vary drastically from one person to another, making the prediction of individual effects virtually impossible. And the horror stories affiliated with the use of these substances continue to surface. To combat this growing issue, it is imperative that leaders disseminate information and build awareness within our formations and family readiness groups.

Horror Stories

While some control measures are in place, it is easy to purchase these drugs merely by walking into a downtown novelty store or searching online, where the drugs are advertised as seemingly common items. Although the potential legal repercussions can be frightening, they pale in comparison to other possible consequences such as these:

- After missing a formation for a significant training event, a noncommissioned officer at Fort Benning, Georgia, was found in his room. He did not feel well, and—according to his leaders—“did not seem like his usual self.” He began vomiting and was admitted to the hospital for treatment. The cause of his illness was Spice.
- After developing schizophrenia-like symptoms, an 18-year-old woman from San Francisco, California, was admitted to the hospital. Her heightened levels of agitation caused her to bite off a ½-inch piece of her tongue. The status of her physical condition

continued to plummet; due to necrosis, elements of her small intestine and colon were removed. After a long hospitalization, during which several treatments of antipsychotic drugs were administered, she was released. The cause of her severe reaction was *Salvia*.

- After taking a substance that they believed to be “legal,” three paratroopers from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, were hospitalized in critical condition. The drug—given to them by another Soldier—mimicked the effects of Ecstasy, which can lead to muscle breakdown and kidney, liver, and cardiovascular failure. The cause of their reactions was Devil Tracks.
- After snorting a “legal” substance, a young man from Covington, Louisiana, suffered a brutal case of intermittent delirium. His father spent three days taking care of him. During that time, the son’s visions become so intense that he tried to cut his throat, narrowly missing major arteries. On the third day, while the father slept, his son left the room and shot himself. The cause of the severe reaction was Bath Salts.

Drug Facts

Each of these drugs can be described by its own set of unique characteristics and side effects.

Salvia divinorum

Salvia is an herb that contains the active ingredient salvinorin A. Available as seeds, leaves, and liquid extract, *Salvia* can be smoked or ingested (in liquid form). The drug affects brain receptors, causing immediate visual distortions, hallucinations, and alterations in the perception of reality.

The use of *Salvia* is known to cause the following specific side effects:

- Recollection of past memories. For example, the user revisits places from childhood memory.
- Overlapping realities. For example, the user perceives being in several locations at once.
- Synesthesia, or the intertwining of sensations. For example, the user “hears” colors and “smells” sounds.

Spice

Spice—also known as *K2*, *Red Ball*, *Blowout*, and *Chill*—is a synthetic substance that produces effects similar to those of marijuana. Samples taken from various Spice packets have tested positive for the synthetic cannabinoids JWH-018 and JWH-073, which are drugs that were originally developed in the mid-1990s by Clemson University (South Carolina) researchers who were conducting laboratory experiments to determine the effects of the compounds on mice brains.

Symptoms of Spice use include—

- Anxiety.
- Increased heart rate.
- High blood pressure.
- Vomiting.
- Seizures.

Bath Salts

Marketed in specialty shops under such names as *Ivory Wave*, *Bliss*, *Blue Silk*, *Charge Plus*, *White Lightning*, *Cloud 9*, and *Energy 1*, Bath Salts—also known as *fake cocaine*—exists in a white powder form, which users usually snort, but may also smoke or ingest. The active ingredient is 3,4-methylenedioxypyrovalerone (MDPV), which affects the central nervous system.

Users of Bath Salts have reported feelings of alertness, heightened sensory awareness, empathy, and euphoria. However, the DEA has reported that, in higher doses, MDPV is known to cause—

- Sweating.
- Prolonged panic attacks.
- Vasoconstriction.
- High blood pressure.
- Excessively rapid heart rate.
- Psychosis (induced by sleep deprivation).

In Europe, where MDPV has been in circulation since 2007, health care officials report that users “lose touch with reality” and many are currently being treated in mental institutions.

Devil Tracks

Devil Tracks, which contains mephedrone (also called 4-methylmethcathinone), is chemically related to Ecstasy (or 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine [MDMA]). It is available online, where it is advertised as plant food; however, the cost is drastically different. Plant food typically sells for \$10 for 5 pounds, whereas Devil Tracks sells for about \$20 for 500 milligrams. While the sale of Devil Tracks is legal, individuals who are found to be under the influence of mephedrone can be arrested. In addition, Devil Tracks may be detected as MDMA through drug testing.

Federal Matters

On 24 November 2010, the DEA issued a notice of intent to temporarily include five synthetic cannabinoids (including components commonly found in Spice) in the federal Controlled Substances Act. The final order, which went into effect on 1 March 2011, specifies the imposition of all civil, criminal, and administrative penalties on anyone engaged in the possession, manufacture, or distribution of these substances.

Although the drugs contained in Bath Salts (MDPV) and Devil Tracks (mephedrone) are not currently scheduled under the Controlled Substances Act, they are analogs of Schedule I drugs. Consequently, cases involving MDPV or mephedrone may be prosecuted under the Federal Analog Act of the Controlled Substances Act.

Army Restrictions

The possession or use of any of these drugs constitutes a violation of Army Regulation (AR) 600-85, which states that substances used “for the purpose of inducing excitement, intoxication, or stupefaction of the central nervous system” are prohibited.¹ The possession or use of these drugs is also considered a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

In addition, there are some installation-specific policies in place. For example, Fort Benning Policy Memorandum 600-85-1 prohibits the use of “controlled substance analogs,” or “designed” drugs. The policy also specifies that the possession or use of these or similar substances is prohibited on federal government facilities and by Department of Defense personnel working under the authority of the commanding general, U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence. (*Note.* There were 14 Soldiers from Fort Benning who were charged for the possession or use of Salvia or Spice during 2010.)

State Restrictions

Several states have banned these drugs. For example—

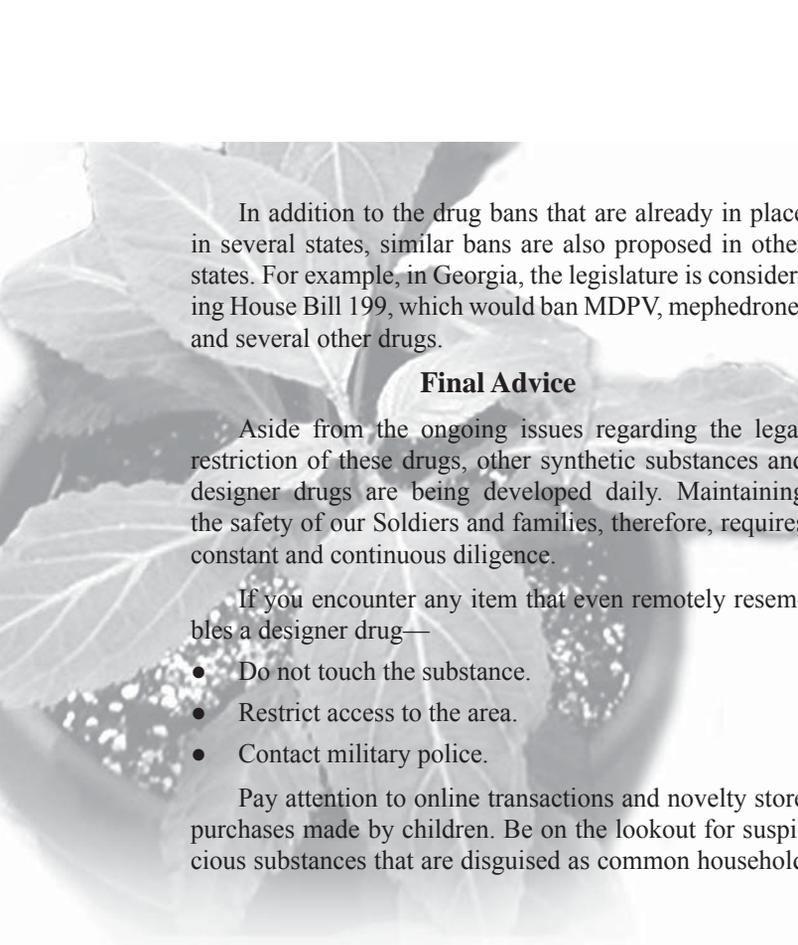
- The sale or possession of MDPV is currently banned in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and North Dakota.
- Salvia was restricted in 21 states and Spice in 13 states before these drugs were placed on the federal temporary list of controlled substances.

The Way Ahead

Drug control measures are under development at state and federal levels; however, the road to gaining control of these substances is a long one.

The five synthetic cannabinoids that were added to the temporary list of controlled substances are scheduled to remain there for one year. This will serve to protect the populace while the DEA effectively researches the drugs to determine whether a permanent ban is warranted.

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In addition to the drug bans that are already in place in several states, similar bans are also proposed in other states. For example, in Georgia, the legislature is considering House Bill 199, which would ban MDPV, mephedrone, and several other drugs.

Final Advice

Aside from the ongoing issues regarding the legal restriction of these drugs, other synthetic substances and designer drugs are being developed daily. Maintaining the safety of our Soldiers and families, therefore, requires constant and continuous diligence.

If you encounter any item that even remotely resembles a designer drug—

- Do not touch the substance.
- Restrict access to the area.
- Contact military police.

Pay attention to online transactions and novelty store purchases made by children. Be on the lookout for suspicious substances that are disguised as common household

items. Conduct health and welfare inspections. Awareness is the key to prevention, and prevention is the solution to protecting the lives and welfare of our Soldiers and families.

Endnote:

¹AR 600-85, *The Army Substance Abuse Program*, 2 February 2009, p. 24.

References:

U.S. Code, Title 10, *Armed Forces*, Subtitle A, Part II, Chapter 47, “Uniform Code of Military Justice.”

Fort Benning Policy Memorandum 600-85-1, *Prevention and Control of Narcotic Analogs*, 21 January 2010.

U.S. Code, Title 21, *Food and Drugs*, Chapter 13, “Drug Abuse Prevention and Control” (Controlled Substances Act).

Captain Singman-Kaine is the deputy provost marshal at Fort Benning. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from Mary Baldwin College, Staunton, Virginia, is a Distinguished Military Graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, and is a graduate of the Marine Corps Expeditionary Warfare School.