

OCEANSIDE'S CRACK-DOWN ON SYNTHETIC DRUGS EARNS LOCAL AND NATIONAL RECOGNITION



Though it has taken nearly ten years, Oceanside has seen significant improvement in reducing the retail sales of synthetic drugs, and the corresponding calls for emergency services. This is due in

large part to the efforts of Senior Deputy City Attorney Annie Higle, and a local ordinance adopted in April 2016 with support from the North Coastal Prevention Coalition (NCPC) and many community partners, including the Oceanside Chamber of Commerce.

In 2010, NCPC grew concerned about the increasing availability of new and emerging substances known as 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 as 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 the Oceanside Police Department 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 outraged when they saw firsthand that some retailers received a letter in May 2011 from the Oceanside 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."**

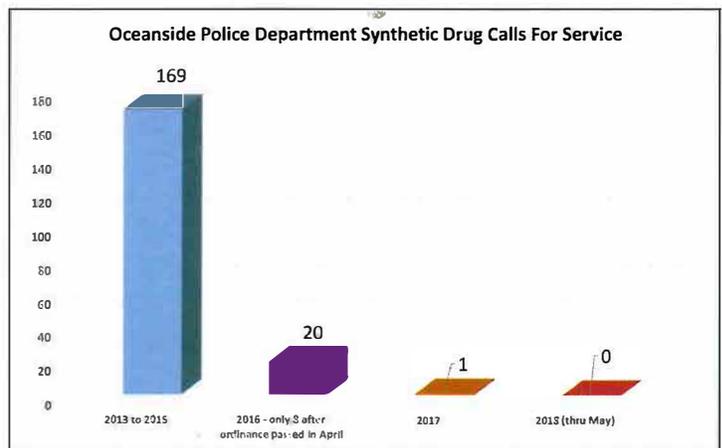


John Mullen, Oceanside City Attorney and Annie Higle, Senior Deputy City Attorney receiving Red Ribbon award

Though these voluntary efforts had some success in reducing availability from corporate stores, other retailers 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 stubborn—two specializing in paraphernalia and two tobacco shops.

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 approach helps overcome the challenge of testing and identifying chemical compounds used in synthetic drugs, which are often changed slightly to avoid federal and state 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 (see chart).

Because of this success, Senior Deputy City Attorney Annie Higle was awarded the San Diego County Excellence in Prevention Advocacy honor at the annual Red Ribbon Luncheon in October 2017, and the North Coastal Prevention Coalition received the 2018 National Award for Innovative Substance Abuse Prevention Programs, Practices and Policies last August in Boston, Massachusetts.

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