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Drug Bust Results in Noticeable Reduction in Spice Incidents

(SOLDOTNA, Alaska) – Since making a large bust which resulted in upwards of 8,000 grams of Spice from a tobacco shop along the Sterling Highway, Sergeant Robert Hunter hasn't heard of a single law enforcement contact or overdose involving the substance.

"That's huge for us," Sergeant Hunter, unit supervisor of the Soldotna Statewide Drug Enforcement Unit. "What really makes this bust unique is that the investigation was in response to community concerns."

According to Sergeant Hunter, starting in October SDEU took the case because people were being very vocal about their concerns that the tobacco shop, Tobacco Distress, was openly selling the synthetic cannabinoid. Something had to be done to address the concerns. Soldotna SDEU learned an Inspector with the Food and Drug Administration was conducting a compliance check of Tobacco Distress in reference to tobacco regulations. The Inspector was contacted and asked to contact Soldotna SDEU if he encountered any suspected synthetic cannabinoids. The inspector did come across packages that were concerning. Investigators with the SDEU walked in to talk with the business operators as the inspector was finishing up. The owner of the shop was also contacted and consent was given for the investigators to search the premises. Numerous packages of what looked to be different brands of Spice were seized. A representation of the different brands was shipped off to be tested for illegal compounds. A substantial amount of the tested product came back as positive for a schedule III controlled substance.

Based on the positive test results, warrants were obtained to further search the business and the private property of the owners, Philip and Loren Kneeland. As a result of the search warrants and the subsequent further investigations, over 6,000 packets of suspected and confirmed controlled synthetic cannabis were seized along with several firearms and other evidence of distribution.

Philip Kneeland, 33 of Soldotna, was arrested and remanded to Wildwood Pretrial on charges of MICS 3, MICS 4, and MIW 2 (for possessing firearms in furtherance of controlled substance distribution). Loren Kneeland, 26 of Soldotna, was arrested and remanded to Wildwood Pretrial on a MICS 4 charge. William Dooley, 27 of Soldotna, was also arrested in connection

to this investigation. Dooley, a Tobacco Distress employee, was remanded to Wildwood Pretrial on charges of MICS 3, MICS 4, and MIW 2 (for possessing firearms in furtherance of controlled substance distribution).

As a result of the October investigation, on January 6, 2016 a Kenai Grand Jury indicted Philip Kneeland on 14 counts of MICS 3, 14 counts of MICS 4, and one count of MIW 2; Loren Kneeland was indicted on 4 counts of MICS 3, and 4 counts of MICS 4; and William Dooley was indicted on 14 counts of MICS 3, 14 counts of MICS 4, one count of MIW 2, and one count of Resisting Arrest. The December investigation is continuing.

“Any time we can remove a large quantity of drugs from our community, it helps,” said Sergeant Hunter. “A big take away from this operation, besides the drug seizures, is that the community was involved. And they know we listened to their concern because we followed up and the investigators were able to substantiate what people were telling us. It is an all-around win.”

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