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# Panel Hears Supporters Of 'Designer Drug' Bills

WASHINGTON (AP) - Congressmen on Thursday opened a new drive to control "designer drugs," searching for a legal weapon against people who make and sell slightly altered, super-potent versions of illegal narcotics.

The new derivatives, designed to circumvent government restrictions, have sprung up mainly in California, Florida and a few other locations. But Rep. Larry Smith of Florida said people elsewhere in the nation should be concerned as well.

"You're not going to be immune, the Hollywood Democrat said. "It's going to come your way and it's going to cause death and injury."

Smith and other supporters of legislation on the issue spoke at a hearing by the House Judiciary crime subcommittee.

The panel is considering several bills, including ones already approved by the Senate that would make it illegal to manufacture with an intent to distribute a drug with properties or effects substantially similar to such tightly controlled drugs as heroin, cocaine or morphine.

Such a law is needed, supporters said, because attempts to control powerful drugs by listing chemical formulas often fall victim to makers' quickness in slightly altering those banned formulas.

Derivatives have been blamed for at least 100 deaths and numerous other injuries in which victims have been paralyzed or subjected to severe body tremors and other serious symptoms after a single injection.

Sponsors of the legislation said many other deaths have probably been caused by designer drugs but not noted as such because the chemicals can be difficult to detect.

Officials from the Justice Department and the National Institute of Drug Abuse submitted testimony calling the derivatives dangerous and supporting legislation to control them.

The American Psychiatric Association and a Harvard Medical School associate professor, Dr. Lester Grinspoon, did, too. But Dr. Everett Ellinwood Jr., representing the association, and Grinspoon both said great care also should be taken so Congress doesn't pass a bill that will slow or even halt needed research on drug derivatives.

Sen. Lawton Chiles, D-Fla., a sponsor of the Senate-passed bill, said he felt such a concern could be answered by the fact that to convict someone under the bill, "you still have to prove the intent; that's a strong burden."

Chiles noted there have also been suggestions the legislation is too broad to withstand a challenge on constitutional grounds. But he and others at the hearing said the danger was so great that quick and strong action was needed.

Rep. Dan Lungren, R-Calif., said, "If the circumstances were not so dire we wouldn't go to this approach. It's a balancing act."