

## **NTSB concerned about emerging class of drugs not picked up in US DOT drug testing**

The US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) believes the driver of a truck that plowed into a motor coach transporting a Texas college softball team in Oklahoma in 2014, killing four players, was likely high on synthetic marijuana. A blood test on the truck driver however did not confirm he had drugs in his system.

NTSB investigators said the truck driver had a history of using synthetic drugs and he made no effort to brake or swerve as his truck drifted across a median and into the oncoming bus. NTSB's medical officer said a blood test couldn't confirm the presence of the drug in the driver's system. *Synthetic cannabinoids*, primarily manufactured overseas, stimulate the same brain receptors as the active ingredient in marijuana but are far more unpredictable. The chemicals are typically applied to dried plant material and misleadingly identified as herbal incense or potpourri and sold at gas stations or convenience stores. Users who smoke the product can experience effects ranging from a mild euphoric high to an overdose resulting in psychosis, seizures or even death.

According to the NTSB's medical officer, these chemicals are marketed fewer than hundreds of different enticing brand names, including *Spice*, *K2*, and *Mellow Mood*. A lab analysis of the pipe found in the truck that crashed into the motor coach showed residue of a synthetic cannabinoid called *5-fluoro-AMB*. The current DOT drug testing guidelines don't include testing for synthetic drugs, despite their widespread availability. NTSB Chairman Christopher Hart said motor carriers need to know about this emerging class of drugs, and they need better tools to detect driver impairment.

The softball team was returning to Gainesville, Texas, from a scrimmage in Bethany when the northbound tractor trailer crossed the median on Interstate 35 and struck the left side of the bus. NTSB investigators also determined that none of the bus passengers were wearing seat belts, which contributed to the severity of the injuries, and recommended mandatory seat belt laws for all vehicles.