



Year in Review
September 2016 – October 2017

September 2016

- **9/7:** U.S. Senators Rob Portman (R-OH), Ron Johnson (R-WI) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) [introduce](#) the [Synthetics Trafficking & Overdose Prevention \(STOP\) Act](#) in the Senate to help stop dangerous synthetic drugs from being shipped into the United States.
- **9/15:** U.S. Representatives Pat Tiberi (R-OH) and Richard Neal (D-MA) [introduce](#) identical legislation in the House of Representatives.
- **9/21:** The U.S. Postal Service Office of the Inspector General releases an [alert](#) outlining concerns about USPS and Customs and Border Protection’s ability to properly screen inbound international packages. The alert states “significant risk exists to the U.S. through the mail importation of illicit goods, narcotics, and the possibility of radioactive materials that could pose a threat to national security.”
- **9/27:** [U.S. Customs and Border Protection \(CBP\) Commissioner Gil Kerlikowske](#) testifies before the House Ways and Means Committee on the effective enforcement of U.S. trade laws, making the case for improved security measures in international mail by stating, “effective targeting not only enables CBP to detect and address potential risks before a shipment arrives at a port of entry, but it also enables CBP to separate low-risk and legitimate shipments from those that require additional scrutiny.”

October 2016

- **10/7:** STOP Act sponsors, Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), Rep. Pat Tiberi (R-OH), and Rep. Richard Neal (D-MA.), write a [letter](#) urging Congress to pass the bill to close the security loophole allowing deadly drugs into the U.S. through the global postal service.
- **10/15:** During a campaign [speech](#) in New Hampshire, then-candidate Donald Trump first acknowledges closing the global postal loophole could help stop the flow of opioids into the U.S. A subsequent plan posted to Trump’s campaign website says his administration would “crack down on the abuse of the loopholes in the Postal Service to literally mail fentanyl and other drugs to users and dealers in the United States.”

December 2016

- **12/16:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) release [new data](#) showing more than 52,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2015 – with 33,091 deaths involving an opioid – surpassing the number of deaths caused by car accidents or gun violence for the first time in U.S. history.

February 2017

- **2/1:** The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission issues a [report](#) identifying China as the primary source of illicit fentanyl in the United States.
- **2/2:** In an interview on current security measures used in the global postal system, Drug Enforcement Administration special agent [Rich Issacson](#) stated that “it would be darn near impossible, considering the resources that we have, to check every package that comes in.”
- **2/14:** Bipartisan members reintroduce the Synthetics Trafficking & Overdose Prevention (STOP) Act in the 115th Congress.
 - “We have a heroin and prescription drug epidemic in our country, and this crisis is being made worse by an influx of deadly synthetic drugs coming into our states from places like China and India,” says Sen. Portman in a related [statement](#).
- **2/23:** The House Energy and Commerce Committee sends a [letter](#) to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy urging the Trump Administration to release critical data on America’s growing fentanyl crisis.

March 2017

- **3/1:** In an interview with WIRED Magazine on keeping fentanyl out of the U.S, Russ Baer, a [spokesman](#) for the Drug Enforcement Administration stated that, “a lot of fentanyl comes through the U.S. mail and mailing services down to 100 or 200 grams. They are able to cut out the middleman, order from the internet from the vendor and two or three days later have those deadly substances on the front door.”
- **3/21:** The House Energy and Commerce Committee hosts a hearing called [Fentanyl: The Next Wave of the Opioid Crisis](#), during which committee members attribute rising overdose deaths to the availability of illicit fentanyl on the online global marketplace.
- **3/29:** President Trump signs an [executive order](#) establishing the President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis.

April 2017

- **4/5:** Senator Portman explains the STOP Act to Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly during a Senate [hearing](#) on border security and public safety. Kelly agrees the STOP Act would help identify dangerous materials sent through the mail.

May 2017

- **5/10:** President Trump officially designates New Jersey Governor Chris Christie to lead the [President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis](#) and names North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper; Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker; Former Democratic Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy; and former Office of National Drug Control Policy deputy director, Bertha Madras, to the team. The interagency [commission](#) will review existing federal programs aimed to combat addiction and drug abuse and will issue subsequent reports assessing the effectiveness of the programs.
- **5/25:** The Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations holds a [hearing](#) convening law enforcement, medical experts, government officials and the private sector to address the flow of opioids into the U.S. through the global postal system.
 - When asked whether advanced electronic data would help CBP target illicit packages, CBP Acting Executive Assistant Commissioner Robert Perez says “absolutely.”
 - “We have had numerous deaths in my state due to fentanyl, and we know that the delivery point is the United States Postal Service,” says Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) during the hearing.

June 2017

- **6/2:** The American Medical Association [announces](#) its support for the STOP Act calling it a “vital tool” to combat America’s opioid epidemic.
- **6/6:** The Drug Enforcement Administration issues guidance to protect first responders from accidental overdoses while on duty. “Assume the worst,” warns acting Drug Enforcement Administration administrator Chuck Rosenberg in a [video](#) on the dangers of synthetic drugs.

July 2017

- **7/12:** The House Energy and Commerce Committee holds a [hearing](#) convening officials from Rhode Island, Virginia, Maryland, and Kentucky to testify on how the opioid epidemic is being addressed at the state level and what lawmakers can do to address the crisis from Washington.
 - John Tilley, Secretary of the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet in Kentucky, told the Committee “I know you’re very well aware of the STOP Act and the issue of keeping fentanyl and carfentanil out of our country. I think this idea contained in the STOP Act, and I won’t comment on the specifics, I understand that would curtail some of that.”
- **7/30:** During a press conference on the Justice Department’s [takedown](#) of dark web giant AlphaBay, Attorney General Jeff Sessions discusses the dangers of synthetic opioids in international mail, citing the overdose death of an 18-year woman who’d purchased illicit drugs on the site.
- **7/31:** President Trump’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis issues its interim [report](#), recommending the declaration of a national emergency as overdose deaths continue to rise, and calling for “support (for) federal legislation to staunch the flow of deadly synthetic opioids through the U.S. Postal Service.”

August 2017

- **8/2:** In an NPR interview on the opioid epidemic, [Acting DEA Administrator Chuck Rosenberg](#) says, “folks can order [fentanyl] easily off the dark web. You can sit down at your computer and in a couple of key strokes find any number of illegal sites, and order it up and have it delivered through the U.S. Postal Service to your home.”
- **8/4:** The Food and Drug Administration [announces plans](#) to step up targeting of synthetic opioids at postal facilities by deploying employees to international mail facilities run by the U.S. Postal Service to help detect and analyze suspicious packages, in addition to FDA’s cybercrime and forensic-chemistry units.
 - We need to “devote even more resources and attention to these risks,” says FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb in remarks reported by the [Washington Post](#). “Facilities check envelopes and packages arriving from more than 180 countries but often don’t have manifest details that would help in targeting shipments.”
- **8/6:** The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) report a 540 percent increase in U.S. fentanyl deaths over just the past three years.
- **8/10:** President Trump [calls](#) the opioid crisis a “national emergency,” pending an official designation from the White House.
- **8/15:** In an interview with the Washington Post, Michael Ferguson, special agent in charge of DEA’s New England division [says](#) “If anything can be likened to a weapon of mass destruction in what it can do to a community, it’s fentanyl. It’s manufactured death.”

September 2017

- **9/7:** The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) releases a [report](#) calling for in-depth analysis of advance electronic security data to stop the flow of synthetic drugs into the U.S, followed by a [hearing](#) by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to examine its findings.
 - According to the [Committee](#), “under the U.S. Postal Service’s current system, majority of packages sent from foreign countries can enter the U.S. without having advanced electronic data processed by our national intelligence and law enforcement agencies.” In the report and at the hearing, GAO called for measurable performance goals to assess the effectiveness of advance electronic data in stopping the importation of drugs through the mail.
 - During the hearing, USPS Acting Inspector General Tammy Whitcomb [says](#) “Analyzing advance electronic data in combination with other postal databases could shine a spotlight on international drug trafficking through the mail and facilitate prevention efforts in the originating countries. In many instances, parcels from suspect shippers can be identified while they are still in transit between countries, which should help ensure they are seized at our border. And for those parcels that make it into the domestic mail stream, analytics will help law enforcement track down the individuals who are trafficking or receiving these dangerous opioids.”
- **9/17:** USA Today [reports](#), that in the search for illicit opioids entering the U.S. through international mail, CBP is unable to keep up with the volume of inbound packages coming through the nation’s busiest international mail sorting facility at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. “It’s still like looking for a needle in the haystack,” the report stated. “If we get the advanced data,” says Frank Russo, the CBP port director for JFK Airport, “we’d be in a much better place.”
- **9/25:** The Washington Post [reports](#) that the FDA is expanding efforts to crack down on websites that “illegally sell opioids online and ship them through the U.S. postal system to U.S. consumers.”
- **9/26:** Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein delivers remarks on transnational crime to the [Interpol 2017 General Assembly](#) in Beijing, China; and meets with dignitaries to [discuss](#) China’s role in fueling America’s fentanyl crisis.
- **9/27:** President Trump’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis holds its [third meeting](#) in Washington, DC, focusing largely on the pharmaceutical side of the crisis.

October 2017

- **10/20:** President Trump’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis to hold its [fourth meeting](#) in Washington, DC.

November 2017

- **11/1:** The President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis is expected to submit its final report to President Trump.