

Gov. Rauner, Lt. Gov. Sanguinetti hail enhanced screening procedures to combat opioid epidemic

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CHICAGO - Improved detection capabilities and increased scrutiny of incoming packages will curb the influx of fentanyl and other deadly synthetic opioids entering the

U.S. through the mail, Gov. Bruce Rauner said today while touring the Chicago International Mailing Facility (IMF).



The governor joined Lt. Gov. Evelyn Sanguinetti and Illinois State Police Director Leo Schmitz in applauding new practices that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employees are implementing at the Chicago IMF to stop the lethal cargo.

“There is great urgency to curb the spread of the opioid epidemic as more Illinoisans die each year from overdoses,” Rauner said. “These enhanced screening procedures will decrease the prevalence of opioids and fentanyl entering our communities. Collaboration amongst federal, state and local government is crucial to combat the projected increases in opioid-related deaths.”

The governor issued an Executive Order Sept. 6, 2017, creating the Opioid Overdose Prevention and Intervention Task Force. He appointed Sanguinetti to co-chair the task force with Dr. Nirav Shah, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health.

“As our task force moves rapidly to implement our Opioid Action Plan and curb the growing opioid overdose epidemic in Illinois, we are fortunate to have strong federal partners like U.S. Customs and Border Protection who are doing everything they can to

keep deadly narcotics off our shores and out of our state,” Sanguinetti said. “This epidemic knows no neighborhood, no color and no class ... it will take all of us working together to curb this deadly scourge.”

Nearly 2,000 Illinoisans died of opioid-related overdoses last year, and the Illinois Department of Public Health projects annual deaths will reach 2,700 by 2020 if nothing more is done to address the issue. Synthetics like fentanyl are fueling the rise in overdose deaths. Fentanyl is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. A dose equivalent to three grains of salt is lethal for an average-sized person, health officials said.

Customs officials seized 82 fentanyl shipments at the Chicago International Mailing Facility (IMF) last year, the second highest number of seizures in the country after the New York IMF. Eighty-nine percent of the fentanyl packages seized at the Chicago IMF were from Hong Kong and China, the primary source of fentanyl in the United States.

Recently launched procedures at the Chicago IMF use Advanced Electronic Data (AED) to enhance screening capabilities. AED is another layer of protection that will help CBP officers effectively target and seize drug packages based on various characteristics. The data will build on other measures such as Gemini™ Analyzer technology that uses spectroscopy for quick and effective chemical identification in fentanyl-filled packages and K-9 units that are specially trained to detect opioids.

“We have a highly dedicated and committed group of CBP officers disrupting the flow of illicit narcotics into our country,” said Matthew S. Davies, Chicago Area Port Director. “We will continue collaborating with our law enforcement partners to improve the efficiency of information sharing in order to identify trafficking trends and execute operations to keep these extremely dangerous drugs off the street.”

Last month, President Trump declared the opioid epidemic a national emergency.

“The opioid crisis has negatively affected far too many citizens of this state,” Illinois State Police Director Leo Schmitz said. “It has robbed people of their futures, destroyed families, and has touched all aspects of society.

“The Illinois State Police is committed to working with our partners in law enforcement, other state agencies and community stakeholders to fight this epidemic,” he continued. “By working together as a team, we can stem the flow of opioids to our communities, educate our children on the dangers of addiction and hold those who violate the law accountable.”

The State of Illinois Opioid Action Plan can be found at <http://dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Illinois-Opioid-Action-Plan-Sept-6-2017-FINAL.pdf>

