

Labeling Disparity

# Suspect was known to smoke herb

## ARIZONA SHOOTING

### Friends say alleged gunman had frequently used potent but legal hallucinogen

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The New York Times



Jared Lee Loughner had used Salvia divinorum.

TUCSON, Ariz. — No one has suggested that his use of a hallucinogenic herb or any other drugs contributed to Jared Lee Loughner's apparent mental unraveling that culminated with his being charged in a devastating outburst of violence here.

Yet it is striking how closely the typical effects of smoking the herb, Salvia divinorum — which federal drug officials warn can closely mimic psychosis — matched Loughner's comments about how he saw the world, like his often-repeated assertion that he spent most of his waking hours in a dream world that he had learned to control.

Salvia is a potent but legal drug marketed with promises of producing a transcendental spiritual journey: out-of-body experiences, existence in multiple realities, the revelation of secret knowledge and, according to one online seller, "permanent mind-altering change in perception."

Loughner, 22, was at one point a

frequent user of the plant, also known as diviner's sage, which he began smoking while in high school during a time in which he was also experimenting with marijuana, hallucinogenic mushrooms and other drugs, according to friends.

Mental-health professionals warn that use of the drug can both aggravate and mask the onset of mental illness.

"He always had it on him," said George Osler IV, whose son, Zach, was good friends with Loughner in high school. It is unclear when Loughner last used the drug.

It remains unclear what, if any, role salvia played in shaping Loughner's views.

But the shootings have once again drawn attention to a drug that — for little more than the cost of a pack of cigarettes and without the hassle of showing a driver's license — a growing number of young people here and throughout much of the country are legally buying and using.

A perennial in the mint family related to the ornamental plant popular with gardeners, Salvia divinorum is native to Mexico and has historically been used by Mazatec shamans in religious rituals, where the large green leaves are chewed or made into a tea. Smoked, the effect is shorter and more intense, typically lasting just a few minutes.

People who have smoked the herb say the experience is often unpleasant, and many never use it again.

The powerful effects have been documented in thousands of online videos documenting experiences on the drug — including a recent video of the teenage music and

## Related developments

**Giffords smiles:** Astronaut Mark Kelly, the husband of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, says his wife's condition has improved so much that she has been able to smile and give him a neck rub as he has kept a near-constant vigil at her hospital bedside. Doctors also said they performed a surgery on Giffords' eye socket to remove bone fragments to relieve pressure on her eye.



Christina Taylor Green

how the gunman methodically went about killing six people and wounding 13 others.

**Trial venue:** U.S. District Judge Larry A. Burns of San Diego, who was assigned to the case against shooting suspect Jared Lee Loughner, is likely to move his trial to San Diego because the tragedy has profoundly shaken so many potential Arizona jurors, legal experts said Monday.

**Law on legislators:** A little-known statutory provision in Arizona state law states that if a public officeholder ceases to "discharge the duties of office for the period of three consecutive months," the office shall be deemed vacant — at such time, a special election could be called to fill the vacancy. An adviser to Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer said it was "unimaginable" that the governor would call for a special election to fill Giffords's 8th District seat and more likely she would ask the legislature to amend the law to allow Giffords a longer period for recovery.

Seattle Times news services

year, a higher percentage than use Ecstasy or cocaine and more than twice as much as LSD, according to a federal survey released in 2009.

Nationwide, poison centers treated 117 Salvia divinorum exposures in 2010, up from 81 the year before.

Salvia's growing popularity has led nearly half the states to ban or restrict the sale of the herb, which is often treated with concentrated extract of the active chemical to make it more powerful.

The push coincides with recent efforts by states around the country to outlaw a number of other legal drugs that often sit alongside salvia on the shelves that use chemical additives to mimic the effects of illegal drugs like marijuana.

In Arizona, however, salvia and synthetic drugs like Spice and K2 can legally be sold to anyone, including minors, and is available at smoke shops, liquor stores and even grocery stores. The drug, which is legal in Washington state, is also widely sold on the Internet with more potent versions accompanied by warnings like "reality is ripped to shreds."

Eric Meyer, a doctor and member of the Arizona Legislature, has introduced bills each of the past two years to restrict the sale of salvia to those 21 and older (three states, including California, have age restrictions). Both years the bill died without coming to a final vote.

The Drug Enforcement Agency has listed salvia as a drug of concern and is considering classifying it as a Schedule I drug, like LSD or marijuana, according to the National Institutes of Health.

television star Miley Cyrus laughing hysterically and babbling nonsensically after smoking the drug.

Nearly 6 percent of high-school seniors and college students reported using the drug in the previous