



Mark Your Calendars

NDAAs Summer Conference

July 17—20, 2011

Sun Valley, ID

NAPC Summer Conference

July 13—15, 2010

Sun Valley, ID

IACP DRE Section's 17th Annual Training Conference on Drugs, Alcohol and Impaired Driving

July 19—21, 2011

Montreal, Canada

Lethal Weapon

Advanced Trial Advocacy

National Advocacy Center

September 12—16, 2011

Columbia, SC

Upcoming

NDAAs Courses

For a listing of all upcoming NDAAs courses, please go to:
www.ndaa.org

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Between the Lines

Just Like Marijuana?

*By Jennifer Messick**

Spice, also known as K2, is a green leafy plant material that has been sprayed with a combination of research chemical failures that behave like THC. In essence, they are synthetic cannabinoids. Packaged in psychedelic-colored foil packets, it is marketed as "incense" and can be bought at head shops, smoke shops and the internet. It can also be bought at some convenience stores, right next to the 5-hour energy drinks that are currently popular among teenagers. While it may look like cheap marijuana, its effects are more like PCP or the drug evaluation and classification category of dissociative anesthetics. As a result, users of this drug pose a safety risk to officers, paramedics, parents and anyone else around them.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

In the mid 1990's, pharmaceutical companies were competing to isolate the good, medicinally desirable properties about marijuana from the non-desirable effects. This led to the creation of a synthetic cannabinoid without all the other health risks of the real thing. As with any research, mistakes were made along the way. JWH-018, one of the most common compounds found in Spice, is one of those mistakes. Researchers went on to publish their work on these efforts and unfortunately gave basement scientists access to dangerous recipes.

In 2008, German scientist Vokl Aurwater, along with others, analyzed several samples of Spice/K2 and identified 5 psychoactive compounds: JWH-018, HU-210, CP 47-497, JWH-073 and JWH-210.¹ This work was verified by a DEA lab in the USA. Some samples contained all 5 while some only had one or two. However, at 3 - 800 times the potency of marijuana, a trace amount of just one of these compounds can have adverse effects. Since 2008, manufacturers have continued to make additional compounds which have been identified in Spice products.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE

The compounds in their pure form are a white powder and look like cocaine. Distributors dissolve the powder in acetone or vitamin E oil and then spray it onto the plant material, which in itself is benign. Packaged in 1g-5g foil packets or sexy glass vials, it sells for about twice the price of marijuana (\$25-\$40g) and is marketed as incense with the warning that it is "not for human consumption" to avoid FDA regulation. It is apparent that Spice was never intended to make one's house smell nice. Even though it comes in a variety of flavors like watermelon, blueberry, cherry, vanilla and root beer, its odor is pungent and can smell like dried urine as opposed to fruit.

The marketing of Spice is rather ingenious. The marketers could just as easily have sprayed it onto a sugar cube or a piece of paper, however that would give the consumer the appearance of "dropping acid". Instead, they spray it on dried green leafy material to look like marijuana and the delivery method is the same. They also have the added benefit of being able to call it synthetic marijuana because the developers were trying to make a safe synthetic cannabinoid. What marketers don't explain is that the original researchers tested the compounds on rats and pigeons and, due to the adverse reactions did not test it further. These compounds were never intended for human use, nor have they ever been tested on humans. There is no legitimate use.

EFFECTS

Like PCP or LSD, the effects are cyclic and vary from user to user and even the same user can have very different effects the next time. Based on information provided by law enforcement, EMS, poison control centers and user blogs, the most common effects are very high blood pressure (200+/100+), hallucinations, delusions of death, numbness

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* Jennifer Messick is the Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor for the City of Anchorage, Alaska. She has presented on the topic of synthetic cannabinoids to law enforcement and prosecutors across the country.

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and tingling, low body temp (94.6), completely garbled, incoherent speech, unconsciousness, memory loss and seizures. The same user may cycle through symptoms several times during the high so you can expect that things like HGN may be present at one point, and then disappear, only to return later. The high can last anywhere from 20 minutes to over 30 hours. Some effects are permanent. At least two users killed themselves while high on Spice and several traffic fatalities have resulted from high drivers. In Montana, a 16 year old's heart stopped while smoking Spice. Testing at NMS labs, (the only lab able to test blood for several of the compounds), revealed no other drugs present except JWH-018. In Alaska, a 32 year old's heart stopped after he and his two roommates smoked a packet of Spice. Medics were able to get his heart restarted but he never regained consciousness and never made any effort to breathe on his own. Four days later life support was removed.

Marijuana = tired, lazy and hungry

K2 = seizures, hallucinations, unconscious or dead

PROBLEMS IN OUTLAWING

One problem with controlling these compounds is that manufacturers anticipated that the government would take action to ban the substances so they have analog compounds on the shelf waiting to go. Already, K3 and other brands are marketed as "100% legal" and not containing any of the banned chemicals.

Another problem is the trash can in the laboratory. More experimental failures than just JWH-018 happened. Other failed "recipes" exist and manufacturers can simply fish another one out and make it. The difficulty in attempting to specifically ban these substances is the ease in which the compounds can be changed. On the other hand, a law written too broadly will draw constitutional objections for being overly-broad and not providing adequate notice of what substances are banned.

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Prosecutors and law enforcement have a social, if not moral, obligation to recognize these drugs as dangerous and warn the public. A combination of three things make this drug attractive not only for kids, but for a segment of our society that might not normally experiment with drugs. In our society we rely heavily on our government to protect us from things that are harmful. One way they do that is to make them illegal. Over 30 states have yet to criminalize these compounds. Combining that with the word synthetic makes it sound like it's *better* than ordinary marijuana. Then add the caveat that it is an "all natural, herbal proprietary blend" which almost sounds homeopathic or like harmless health food and the result is a very dangerous drug that appeals to a segment of society that might not normally experiment with drugs.

¹ Auwarter V, Dresen S, Weinmann W, et al, 'Spice and other herbal blends: harmless incense or synthetic cannabinoid designer drug?' J Mass Spec, 44:832-837, 2009.

On March 1, 2011 the Federal Government temporarily scheduled 5 compounds commonly found in Spice as Schedule 1 Controlled Substances. The temporary "ban" will remain in effect for one year to give DEA an opportunity to determine whether to add them permanently. They need our help. Please pass any information about Spice related incidents to:

DEA Headquarters
Attn: Drug and Chemical Evaluation Section
8701 Morrisette Drive
Springfield, VA 22152
202-307-7183
ODE@usdoj.gov

LETHAL WEAPON

September 12 – 16, 2011

National Advocacy Center

The National Traffic Law Center is pleased to announce that it will be presenting the **Lethal Weapon** advanced trial advocacy course September 12—16, 2011 thanks to funding obtained through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The costs for airfare and lodging (which includes room, breakfast and lunch) will be provided.

The 4 ½ day course is focused on teaching prosecutors to develop their knowledge and skills in trying vehicular homicide cases and will involve presentations on crash reconstruction, technical investigation at the scene, and toxicology. The course also provides an advanced trial advocacy component in which participants receive a case file and participate in mock trial exercises.

For more information or to apply, go to http://www.ndaa.org/ntlc_training.html



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