

DEA Bans 'Fake Pot' Products That Emulate Marijuana

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by Bill Chappell



Enlarge Kelley McCall/AP

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As of today, the Drug Enforcement Agency has banned "fake pot" substances, which use chemicals to purportedly replicate the effects of marijuana. Those substances had been in a legal limbo, with many states lacking laws to deal with them.

The DEA says the chemicals have provoked reactions that include seizures and hallucinations, and that they pose a threat to public health and safety.

In a Newscast spot, Greg Allen has more details:

At least 16 states have already adopted their own bans on the herbal products laced with chemicals that the makers claim mimic the effects of THC — the active ingredient in marijuana.

Since last year, poison control centers across the country have taken more than 3,000 calls related to the synthetic marijuana products, which are sold under names like K2 and Spice.

The five chemicals banned are synthetic cannabinoids. The DEA says they have not been approved by the FDA for human consumption. Some emergency rooms have reported that users experience side effects including anxiety attacks, elevated heart rates, vomiting, even convulsions.

The DEA is banning the chemicals for at least a year while it studies a permanent ban.

The drug agency lists the five banned substances on its site as JWH-018, JWH-073, JWH-200, CP-47,497, and cannabicyclohexanol.

A college professor helped to create one of the first and most famous of the cannabinoids in the 1990s, when he was conducting research on possible medical applications of marijuana.

Within a few years, Clemson University chemistry professor John Huffman's formula for the cannabinoid JWH-018 was published in the *American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics*.

Soon after, products made from Huffman's formula found their way into Europe's party scene. And then they migrated to America in recent years.

Huffman has always warned people not to smoke any products containing the chemical. In 2009, he repeated that warning in an interview with *The State* newspaper: "Do not use this stuff," he said. "We don't know how toxic it is."

Announcing the ban, DEA Administrator Michele M. Leonhart said, "Young people are being harmed when they smoke these dangerous 'fake pot' products and wrongly equate the products' 'legal' retail availability with being 'safe.'"

Despite the ban, it seems likely that some manufacturers will try to adapt their formulas so they include cannabinoid chemicals other than the five banned Monday.