

Synthetic mix used as marijuana alternative

By Ivey DeJesus and Kourtney Geers
THE (HARRISBURG) PATRIOT-NEWS

HARRISBURG — A sandwich bag filled with oregano has long served as the punchline for practical jokes on unsuspecting parents or gullible roommates.

Fake marijuana has certainly come a long way.

Sold as herbal incense under names such as K2, Spice, Genie and Wicked, a synthetic marijuana has legions of smokers around the country rolling it or putting it in their pipes.

Banned in eight states, it's legal in Pennsylvania — for now — and sold in head shops, at some gas stations and on the Internet. Yet this synthetic and chemically treated substance is potent and potentially dangerous.

"Most people aren't expecting it to be that potent. It's overpowering," said Roger Weaver, who works at Hemp's Above, a Mechanicsburg shop that carries mostly smoking accouterments.

Since the shop started carrying herbal incense a few months ago, sales have been brisk, drawing a cadre of return customers, many lured by the fact that the incense leaves no chemical trace in the bloodstream.

"There's a lot of people who work in sensitive jobs," said Hemp's Above owner Brian Edmondson.

On a recent afternoon, a woman accompanied by two men entered the shop to buy herbal incense.

"It's legal. If we get caught with it, we won't go to jail," she said. Regardless, she would not give her name.

"I don't want my mom to know I'm smoking this (stuff)," she said, settling on a \$20 vial.

"Most people aren't expecting it to be potent. It's overpowering."

Roger Weaver
Hemp's Above

She said it's worth the money: "If you get caught with pot, you get fined and all sorts of crap."

Edmondson finalized the sale and resumed his place behind the glass case that carries his products.

"I don't sell junk. What's in there is the best," said Edmondson, who has tried the stuff.

Tending to a first-time buyer, he suggested the man try the less-potent variety.

The effects vary by brand from a "meditative" state to something a little stronger.

"It has higher plateau and a bigger drop," Edmondson said. "Once it starts to go — it starts fairly quickly and ends fairly quickly. The duration is not quick."

Edmondson won't sell to anyone under 18. He checks customers' identification and doesn't even allow parents to bring their children into the shop.

K2 is the common reference for herbal incense. Edmondson's shop doesn't carry the brand K2, however, because distributors have high minimum orders.

He carries mostly Wicked, a brand distributed by King Krypto in Florida, and averages 100 grams in sales a week.

Edmondson sells the vials by the gram, ranging in price from \$20 to \$100, and in flavors such as strawberry, mint and blueberry. That means that when smoked, the herbal incense emits a fruity aroma. Still, Edmondson thinks it's a bad idea to smoke it in public.

He pulled one of the vials out of the glass case and read the label: "We are not liable for anything."

The synthetic cannabinoids found in herbal incense are reported to be four to five times more potent than THC, the psychoactive substance in cannabis.

"Technically, it's incense," Edmondson said. "It's not supposed to be rolled or smoked in a pipe. But what anyone does with it, it's up to them."

Edmondson said the last trend that brought business like this to his store was salvia divinorum, an herb once used by Mazatec Indians in Mexico to treat diarrhea and headache.

Users smoke the plant's dried leaves to get a high reportedly similar to that of LSD. Edmondson's shop still carries it, but it's on the wall behind the featured glass case of Wicked products.

Salvia gained national attention in 2006 when it was said to be a contributing factor in the suicide of a 17-year-old Delaware boy. Just after Brett Chidester's death, the Delaware Legislature banned salvia.

There seems to be a disconnect between the popularity of herbal incense and the knowledge about it by state police, hospitals, and drug and alcohol service programs in Pennsylvania.

Most said they haven't encountered K2 or Wicked, while neighbors Ohio, New York and New

Jersey are considering banning it.

On Friday, state Rep. Jennifer L. Mann, D-Lehigh, introduced legislation to ban the sale or use of synthetic marijuana in Pennsylvania.

She said the drug is so new that no federal or Pennsylvania law exists to give police the right to arrest those who possess the substance.

"By setting clear guidelines on the use and consumption of synthetic marijuana, we empower our law enforcement personnel to stop the spread of this new threat to our children and communities," Mann said.

Some bans around the country are based on reports of people

being sent to hospitals after smoking the substance. Authorities in Iowa are investigating whether an 18-year-old committed suicide after smoking synthetic marijuana with friends.

The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports minor to moderate reactions to synthetic marijuana, including fast heart rates, confusion and nausea. None of the 698 poison reports related to synthetic marijuana in 2010 is from Pennsylvania.

The woman in Edmondson's shop said the substance doesn't generate a uniform effect.

"It's different for everybody," she said.



Many people are trying K2, which has been banned in eight states.

Marcellus Shale drilling yields 1,400 violations

By Marc Levy
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

HARRISBURG — Companies rushing to drill for natural gas in the rich Marcellus Shale reserve a mile below Pennsylvania have tallied more than 1,400 violations of state laws since January 2008, according to an environmental advocacy group's analysis of state data.

The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association said 952, about two-thirds, of the violations caused or had the potential to cause environmental damage, from chemical spills to improperly lined sludge pits. The rest were classified as safety or administrative violations.

More than half the environmental violations involved improper construction of a wastewater pit or improper control of erosion during earth-moving activity, both of which can result in water pollution. One in six of the environmental violations, or 154, dealt with

industrial waste spills while one in 10, or 100, dealt with unspecified violations of the state's waterway protection law.

The modern-day gas rush has poured billions of dollars into the Marcellus Shale region, which underlies New York,

Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. Many residents have complained the drilling techniques used are unsafe, but the drilling companies say that's untrue.

A portion of the report sorts the violations by company and divides by the number of wells each company drilled, giving a snapshot of the best performers against the worst offenders.

The association's project coordinator, Elana Richman, said the staff had been reading news reports of the violations and wondered how many more violations were happening.

"We felt like there was more out there that we weren't seeing and we wanted to know what really was going on," Richman said Tuesday. The association filed a Right-to-Know request with the Department of Environmental Protection and received information on spreadsheets.

Some of the violations reported in the media were not included in

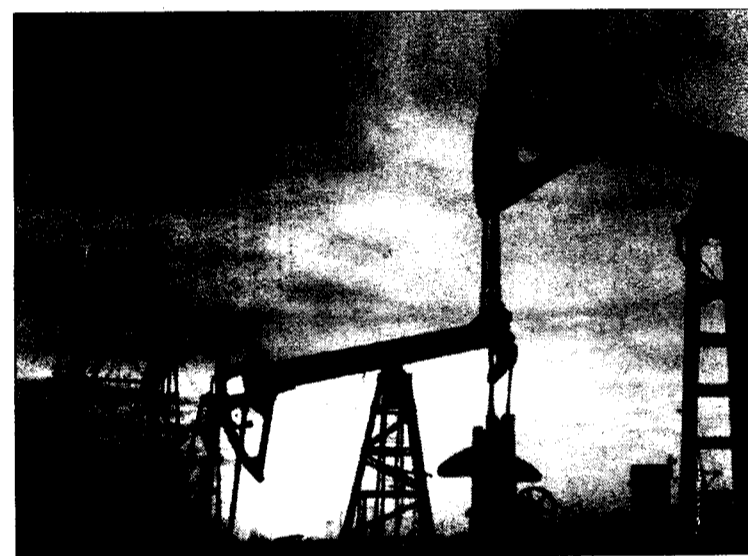
the spreadsheets, a discrepancy the association has been unable to resolve with the department.

The numbers also do not include violations by trucks hauling wastewater away from drilling sites.

The association did not take a position on whether the number is too high, but two conservation groups — the Sierra Club and Clean Water Action — each cited the report in calling for more state inspections of drilling sites.

A trade group of companies working in the region, the Marcellus Shale Coalition, said the report shows the Department of Environmental Protection is well-staffed and watching the industry carefully.

In Pennsylvania, where drilling is most active, state regulators have issued more than 3,700 permits in 2009 and 2010 to drill Marcellus Shale wells, and more than 1,700 have been drilled since 2008 began.



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