

## Synthetic Marijuana Explained: Quick Facts About K2

(July 12) — Synthetic marijuana has law enforcement agencies and state legislatures buzzing. Last week, Missouri became the sixth state in only a year to ban the substance, which is touted as a legal alternative to pot and widely available across the country.

Also known as K2, the combination of herbs mixed with a lab-produced strain of marijuana is usually marketed as incense or bath salts.

But K2 is being blamed in at least one death, that of 18-year-old suicide victim David Rozga in Iowa, as well as hundreds of emergency room visits and 567 calls to poison-control centers this year alone. In 2009, there were a mere 13 calls to poison-control centers.

As lawmakers debate legalizing genuine weed, they're now coping with burgeoning use of the fake stuff. All while aficionados, like 25-year-old Albert Kuo, keep smoking.

"I know it's not going to kill me," Kuo told The New York Times. "It's a waste of time, effort and money to ban something like this."

**A Drug Produced In — and Designed for — the Lab**

K2 originated at Clemson University, where researchers developed synthetic cannabinoids in an effort to create therapeutic drugs. But the cannabinoids also have effects akin to THC, the key ingredient in marijuana.

And since K2 is largely created by individual sellers, it's anyone's guess what else is added to the mix.

"Our biggest concern is that this particular chemical is likely manufactured in a dorm-room setting," Dr. Gaylord Lopez, head of the Georgia Poison Center, told CNN. "And these dorm-room scientists are not going to be exhibiting a lot of quality-assurance techniques."

That's why side effects, thought to include heart palpitations and breathing problems, can't be pinpointed. Cannabinoids were created for entirely different purpose, and their toxicity — not to mention the toxicity of other ingredients in K2 — is unknown.

### **A Trend That Lit Up Online**

Already illegal in Britain, Germany, Poland and France, K2 is slowly being banned in states across the U.S. But even if you can't buy it at a head shop in

Missouri anymore, it's widely available on the Internet — which seems to be where K2 rose to popularity in the first place.

For \$35, users can buy 3 grams of K2 “incense” with nothing more than a credit card or PayPal account.

And while the Internet is helping purveyors sell more K2, the Clemson researcher who created the cannabinoid compounds, Dr. John Huffman, told British newspaper *The Guardian* that if it wasn't K2, it'd be something else.

“I've lived around the world a long time,” he said. “I've come to the conclusion that if an enterprising person wants to find a new way to get high, they're going to do it.”

### **Illegal, but Tough to Target**

The synthetic nature of K2 makes it exceptionally difficult to keep tabs on. The cannabinoids used to produce K2 can be changed with slight laboratory tweaks, and hundreds are already out there, so a ban on current varieties can easily be sidestepped.

And urine-based detection tests are also unlikely to yield much progress in curbing K2's popularity. Redwood Toxicology today announced a test to spot two cannabinoids often used in K2, and described the process as “very difficult.”

### **Oh, and It Works**

At least, that was the conclusion of an

intrepid reporting team from Kansas City's *The Pitch*. Five testers bought two varieties of K2 at a botanical store and “smoked up in the parking lot like a bunch of high school kids getting stoned before first bell.”

The overwhelming consensus, among both regular and nonregular pot smokers, was that K2 got the job done — but not for long enough.

“It didn't last long, but I did feel some visual effects (things appeared bright, slightly blurry) and a relaxed physical state,” noted one tester.

And if you don't like pot, you probably won't be into the synthetic variety. “K2 made me feel just as uncomfortable and self-conscious as actual marijuana,” reported a nonsmoker. “Two thumbs up!”

### **Read More:**

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