



The Addiction and Behavioral Health Newsletter

© 2010

A publication of JRW Behavioral Health Services
<http://www.randallwebber.com>

SPECIAL EDITION

DECEMBER 2, 2010

“Herbal Incense” Update

DEA Implements Emergency Scheduling of Synthetic Cannabinoids

On November 24, 2010, the federal Drug Enforcement Administration used its emergency scheduling authority to temporarily control five chemicals (JWH-018, JWH-073, JWH-200, CP-47,497, and cannabicyclohexanol) that are used to make “K2”, “Spice”, “Red Dragon”, “Black mamba”, “Spice” and other “herbal incense” products. As reported in prior editions of this newsletter*, the banned chemicals are synthetic cannabinoids, similar in effect to Δ^9 -THC, the intoxicating ingredient in marijuana, hashish and other cannabis products. They are also similar to the endogenous cannabinoids that are found in the human brain.

Except as authorized by law, this action will make possessing and selling these synthetic cannabinoids or the products in which they are contained illegal for at least one year (beginning Christmas Day, 30 days after the DEA’s November 24th action) while the DEA and the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) further study whether these chemicals and products should be permanently controlled. They will be designated as Schedule I substances, the most restrictive category, which is reserved for unsafe, highly abused substances with no medical usage. Current Schedule I substances include heroin, PCP and marijuana. Reportedly herbal incense suppliers will have until the December 25th date to sell their current inventory. This may produce an escalated rate of use and/or either price cuts or increases as the U.S. moves toward the temporary ban.

In Illinois, legislation has already been passed that will make several of the synthetic cannabinoids illicit drugs as of January 1, 2011. Fifteen other states have already taken similar action. The new DEA scheduling will ban these substances in all 50 states.

The banned chemicals are among at least 100 synthetic cannabinoids that have been developed over the past 15 years. It is expected that “herbal incense” manufacturers (many of whom appear to be based in China) will switch to a legal cannabinoid in order to continue

* Volume 1, Numbers 3, 6 & 7, available on-line at <http://randallwebber.com>

making their products. Already, legal forms of herbal incense are being advertized on the Internet.

It should be noted that there is virtually no published scientific research regarding the effects of any of the synthetic cannabinoids on human subjects. Reports from the physical and behavioral health communities as well as from drug users themselves abound, but thus far these are anecdotal.

What should substance abuse treatment programs do at this point?

1. Acquaint yourself with the ever-changing facts about herbal incense[†].
2. Monitor your clients' knowledge and use of these products.
3. Include screening for synthetic cannabinoids in urine tests on a routine or selected basis[‡]
4. Education schools, social service programs and parents

It is likely that new forms of herbal incense, with new brand names, will appear soon. Like street drug such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine (as well as current herbal incense products), the source, potency and overall effects of these new substances will be unknown. Monitor your regular drug information source (including your clients) for updated information.

Source: "DEA Moves to Emergency Control Synthetic Marijuana". Retrieved November 24, 2010 from <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/pressrel/pr112410.html>

[†] We will offer an IAODAPCA-approved herbal incense update once a week. Each month, one of these will be available free of charge. Dates and times will be posted soon at <http://www.randallwebber.com>

[‡] A urine and saliva test for some of the synthetic cannabinoids is available through some laboratories, including Redwood Toxicology Laboratories (<http://www.redwoodtoxicology.com>)