



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH to issue emergency order making synthetic marijuana compounds illegal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, will sign an emergency order making the possession or sale of chemical compounds typically found in synthetic marijuana substances unlawful. The substances will be placed under Schedule I of the Alabama Controlled Substances List effective on Oct. 24.

The Alabama Department of Public Health heard testimony at a public hearing on Sept. 19 on concerns about synthetic marijuana products known by the common street names of "Spice," "K2" and others. These psychoactive herbal and chemical substances have been sold in a variety of stores and marketed online as herbal incense or potpourri.

Persons commenting at the hearing expressed concern that there is a misconception by those who purchase the substances that they are safe because of the way they are packaged and sold at a variety of retail outlets.

"These substances have been wrongly presented as a safe and legal alternative to marijuana," Dr. Williamson said. "By supporting regulations outlawing their possession and sale, we want the public to be aware of the toxic effects and other dangers associated with synthetic marijuana use."

Gov. Robert Bentley said, "Alabamians need to be aware that these goods contain synthetic drugs and other chemicals which are very dangerous to their health. They are being sold in convenience stores and tobacco shops all over this state to unwary individuals including our children. We are asking store owners and operators to remove these products from their shelves. And, we have instructed our law enforcement agencies to take possession of any that they find for sale. Since the substances within these products have been scheduled as controlled substances, it will be illegal to make, sell, possess or use these dangerous drugs."

At the urging of law enforcement and Alabama's district attorneys, State Sen. Arthur Orr of Decatur and Rep. Allen Farley of Birmingham are sponsoring a bill in the legislature to prohibit

the manufacture and sale of synthetic marijuana compounds in different variations. Under the proposed bill, the sale and possession of these substances would constitute felonies.

Orr said, “Local law enforcement attempts to protect the public have been thwarted by ever-emerging new substances of concern. Passage of this law will stop the makers of these dangerous substances from developing new formulas that skirt existing bans by shifting the chemical makeup of the substances in order to stay legal.”

Chris McCool, president of the Alabama District Attorneys Association, stated “We applaud the efforts of Dr. Williamson, Senator Orr, Rep. Farley and our state’s district attorneys for acting swiftly in closing this loophole in the law by giving law enforcement the tools to prosecute those individuals who seek to profit from the misery of this dangerous product.”

Since October 2010, the Regional Poison Control Center at Children’s of Alabama reports receiving 101 calls from persons exposed to “K2” or “Spice.” Three victims were children 6 to 12 years of age, 35 were teenagers and 32 were in their 20s. Symptoms they experienced were classified as follows: neurological, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, respiratory, dermal and ocular.

While the “high” for synthetic marijuana may last no more than 15 to 20 minutes, users can experience the chronic side effects for weeks. Adverse medical side effects of its use are not fully known, but include the following:

- Anxiety attacks
- Seizures
- Hallucinations
- Nausea and vomiting
- Increased heart rate and rapid pulse
- Paranoia
- Suicidal thoughts
- Aggression and uncontrollable rage
- Agitation
- Addiction
- Severe depression

Twenty-four substances were placed under emergency control. In February 2011, two other dangerous chemicals which were being marketed as “bath salts” were added to the Alabama Controlled Substances List, which made possession, manufacture or distribution of these

substances illegal. The synthetic marijuana compound found in products such as "Spice" and "K2" is a different but still harmful substance.

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