

Strategic Analysis and Information Center

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The Ohio Homeland Security Strategic Analysis and Information Center will facilitate effective terrorism related information and intelligence sharing, working with and supporting local, state, and federal governmental agencies, public and private sectors, and the citizens of Ohio.

Bulletin 2010-061

UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

20 May 2010

(U//LES) Situational Awareness: Background and Use of Synthetic Marijuana

(U) Key Judgments

(U//FOUO) This bulletin provides information on a growing trend involving the use of an herb-based product similar to marijuana known as “Spice”, or “K2”. The product is being used to get high and it is legal to purchase.

- The growing popularity of the drug is causing increasing alarm among law enforcement officials, lawmakers, and health care professionals across America.
- “Spice” has been banned by some U.S. domestic and overseas military commands as well as in Germany and other European countries because substances have been identified in the product to have the presence of chemicals with tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)-like effects.
- Medical officials concur that smoking “Spice” can cause adverse effects to one’s health.
- Although a few states have banned the sale or use of the product, it is easily accessible via the internet and head shops throughout the U.S. and is increasing in popularity and use.



¹ http://www.jeffwolfsberg.com/_wpJW/wp-content/uploads/spice_gold_3g.jpg Accessed 10 May 2010

² [http://www.legalbudhighs.com/products/K2-Bloom Herbal incense 2 oz Extra Strong Party Pack](http://www.legalbudhighs.com/products/K2-Bloom%20Herbal%20incense%20oz%20Extra%20Strong%20Party%20Pack).

Accessed 19 May 2010

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(U) Composition and Effects

(U//FOUO) “Spice” was first synthesized in an academic chemistry lab in South Carolina for pharmaceutical research. It moved on to become a plant growing aid in Asia, and is now manufactured and marketed online as herbal incense. It is sold in 3 - 5 gram bags in various flavors.³

(U//FOUO) “Spice” consists of herbs that are sprayed with synthetic substances that mimic THC, a natural chemical ingredient in marijuana. The danger in smoking “Spice” is that the product is unregulated and not manufactured in a controlled environment. Smoking this product could be very harmful because the substance could also include unknown contaminants. Therefore, there is no way to accurately determine what the potential harmful effects could be.⁴

(U//LES) The National Capital Region Intelligence Center, in Fairfax County, Virginia, recently issued a product detailing acetone’s use in “Spice” production. Acetone is one of at least three ingredients used in the production of synthetic marijuana. The acetone is used to transfer chemical compounds onto plant leaves – allowing the product to be smoked. Law enforcement personnel are to be mindful of the fact that acetone is also a precursor used in the production of explosives.⁵

(U//FOUO) Hospitals have reported incidents of people, mostly teenagers, visiting emergency rooms for:

- heart palpitations,
- respiratory issues,
- panic attacks,
- hallucinations,
- delusions,
- and, one case where a teen lapsed into a coma.⁶

(U//FOUO) Recent tests have shown that smoking the drug can cause side effects on the heart, circulatory and nervous system. A spice high can cause what is known as “couchlock” or the inability

³ <http://www.abcnews.go.com> ABC News Medical Unit March 17, 2010 “K2 Giving People Another Dangerous Way to get High Marijuana-like Drug Mixed With Incense Being Smoked”. Accessed 10 May 2010

⁴ Mind Hacks: Spice flow: the new street drug pharmacology December 01, 2009, Accessed 13 May 2010 and Wikipedia Accessed 13 May 2010

⁵ USDHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Accessed, 23 May 2010

⁶ “Synthetic Marijuana A Growing Trend Among Teens, Authorities Say”, CNN/WIBW.com March 24, 2010. Accessed 10 May 2010

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to move. Other risks include body numbness, lung irritation, high blood pressure, intense headaches, blacking out and blurred vision.⁷

(U) Use and Regulation

(U//LES) On 20 November 2008, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers at the Port of Dayton, DHL^{USBUS} Express Hub, at Wilmington, Ohio, seized a total of 31.65 kilograms of alleged herbal incense products that contained the THC-like chemical HU-210 from two parcels. CBP officers opened the packages and discovered numerous 3-gram pouches and packets that contained a brown plantlike material. The pouches were variously labeled as "Spice Silver," "Spice Gold," "Spice Diamond," "Yucatan Fire," and "Genie." CBP officers tested the plant-like material with field test kits for marijuana, and the results were negative. Samples of the plant-like material were submitted to the CBP Laboratory at Chicago, Illinois, and when tested, they were found to contain HU-210 which is a chemical analogue of THC. Between 20 November 2008, and 13 January 2009, five shipments of these products were seized and they contained a total of 46.65 kilograms of the brown plant-like material. The parcels had been sent via DHL Express delivery from a business in the Czech Republic to an individual in Florida. The contents of the packages were described on the bills-of-lading as "Herbal Incense."⁸

(U//FOUO) It has become popular among students and parolees who use it as an alternative to smoking marijuana to avoid a positive drug test.⁹

(U//FOUO) Although "Spice" is currently legal it is a potentially dangerous and addictive substance that has lawmakers in several states considering legislation to make its use illegal. Kansas is the first state to ban synthetic marijuana. Other states considering similar legislation include Illinois, Tennessee, Kentucky, Utah, Georgia, Michigan, New York, Louisiana and Missouri.¹⁰

⁷ "What is SPICE – The New Herbal Marijuana", Jeff Wolfsberg, Drug Education specialist, September 18, 2009. Accessed 10 May 2010

⁸ Seizure information courtesy of the CBP Port of Dayton, DHL Express Hub. Laboratory information courtesy of the CBP Laboratory at Chicago, IL, EPIC Bulletin EB09-07"Spice" and Other Smokable Herbal Blends Found to Contain Potent Synthetic THC-Like Chemicals February 10, 2009.

⁹ "Facts about new synthetic drugs K2 or Spice" Examiner February 24, 2010, Accessed 21 May 2010

¹⁰ "Legal Substance's Effects Similar to Marijuana" WBNS 10 TV, Columbus, OH May 11, 2010.

Accessed 20 May 2010

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(U) Future Outlook

(U//FOUO) A drug addiction and treatment center in Ohio reports that the danger of these products and other unregulated substances is that users perceive *legal* to mean *safe*, but they are just as dangerous to use as illegal drugs. In response to these concerns, some schools have sent out emails and letters to parents to warn them about potential dangers of smoking “Spice”.¹¹

(U//FOUO) Currently, there is no legislation pending or being sought in the state of Ohio to regulate the sale or use of “Spice” although documentation has proven its increase in popularity and usage. “Spice” is not a scheduled drug in the U.S., and therefore does not fall into current federal regulations.

¹¹ “Crime Tracker SPECIAL SECTION: Letter Sent Home to Dublin Coffman Parents” WBNS TV May 11, 2010. Accessed 20 May 2010

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Consumer Feedback Survey

Product: (U//LES) Situational Awareness: Background and Use of Synthetic Marijuana; SAIC Bulletin 2010-061

In an effort to improve customer service and enhance the quality of our products, we respectfully request that consumers of information and intelligence from the Strategic Analysis and Information Center (SAIC) complete a feedback survey. Comprehensive feedback and product suggestions help the SAIC Analysis & Production Unit and fusion center partners continuously serve its consumers with greater attention and detail.

Please check the appropriate box	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This product provided useful information.					
This product is detailed and accurate.					
This product contained unique, timely information.					
This product was well researched.					
This product could be used to assist policy making and/or operations.					
Overall, this product is of high quality.					

Comments: