

adn.com

Anchorage Daily News

Print Page

Close Window

Lawmakers seek ban on Spice, legal synthetic marijuana**SYNTHETIC: Alarming trend sweeps nation, finally gets to Alaska.**

By CASEY GROVE
casey.grove@adn.com

(10/20/10 11:41:47)

A new street drug that authorities claim is capable of causing everything from hallucinations and slurred speech to death is sweeping the nation and has made its way to Alaska, according to local police and public officials.

It goes by many names -- Spice, Spike, K2 -- but the new craze among kids, the military and others looking for a high is essentially synthetic marijuana: plant material that can hold any number of various sprayed-on psychotropic compounds.

And for now, it is legal.

State Sen. Kevin Meyer and Anchorage Assembly members Mike Gutierrez and Paul Honeman hope to change that.

The drug can be 600 to 800 times stronger than pot and can cause a physical addiction similar to methamphetamine, Gutierrez said at a press conference Tuesday.

"It's a lot more dangerous than marijuana," Gutierrez said. "Your 14-year-old can walk into a convenience store and, right next to the energy drinks, they can buy it."

Meyer has pre-filed a bill for the state Legislature that would criminalize the drug, and Honeman and Gutierrez plan to introduce a resolution to the Assembly Oct. 26 that would ask local retailers to voluntarily remove it from their shelves until the Legislature has a chance to make it illegal.

Until then, the various types of synthetic pot continue to be marketed as incense and sold in convenience stores and tobacco shops across the country. Everywhere, that is, except 10 states that have already criminalized it.

Driving under the influence of synthetic marijuana can lead to an impaired driving arrest with the same penalties as drunken driving, according to local law enforcement. Hallucinations from smoking it can also compel people to commit other crimes, they say.

A 28-year-old Fairbanks man who told Alaska State Troopers he'd smoked synthetic marijuana early Tuesday morning kicked in the door of an unoccupied home on Goldhill Road, took off all of his clothes and went to sleep in a bed, according to a trooper report.

He did it because "God told him to," troopers said.

In a separate case, in March, a Fort Richardson soldier just back from Iraq was convicted of operating a vehicle while under the influence of Spike. He was arrested after driving his Chevrolet Avalanche over three raised medians, into a concrete wall, and then driving down a sidewalk on flat tires and with a broken axle, according to a police report. The 25-year-old man later admitted to

smoking some Spice, according to the police report.

The arresting officer noted some strange behavior in his report.

"I asked him who was drinking and driving and he said, 'You were,'" wrote Officer Earl Ernest in his report. "He then hollered, 'You drink, you drive, you die.' I asked if he was saying he was going to kill me and he said, 'Yes.' He then threw the cell phone he'd been holding."

The man, who later pleaded guilty to driving under the influence, had no alcohol in his system, according to a breath-alcohol test noted in the police report.

"You may not always have a bad trip, so to speak, but if you do, chances are, you're going to end up in the emergency room, you're going to be seeing the EMTs, you're going to be seeing an ER doc," Gutierrez said.

Some Anchorage teens have been hospitalized, according to the Anchorage School District, which publicized its fears about synthetic marijuana use last April. Still, use of drugs like Spice by Anchorage students does not come close to the number of cases of marijuana use, school district spokeswoman Heidi Embley said.

"You could probably count the number of cases on one hand," Embley said.

Gutierrez and Honeman had not yet compiled a list of Anchorage stores selling Spice and similar smokeable products, but they planned to do so in order to notify stores of their upcoming resolution.

[Print Page](#)[Close Window](#)