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News/Crime

Sheriff's office warns bad 'spice' being sold in Bradenton

The Manatee County Sheriff's Office is warning the community synthetic marijuana being sold locally could be contaminated with a pesticide.

During a recent undercover operation, the sheriff's office purchased 2 kilos of a substance they believed was used to manufacture "spice," a term for synthetic marijuana, according to a news release.

Testing later revealed the substance was acephate, a pesticide used on food crops and citrus trees. Most home uses are no longer allowed, according to the National Pesticide Information Center.

People exposed to acephate may develop nausea, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, shaking, sweating, rapid heart rates and/or confusion, according to the NPIC. The Environmental Protection Agency says it is a "possible" cause of cancer.

"We purchased the chemical we believed went into making spice," Manatee County Sheriff's Office spokesman Dave Bristow said. "When we tested it, all it is, is the pesticide.

"With concerns more tainted spice is circulating, the sheriff's office decided to warn the public.

"The public should be aware, all the time, that there is inherent danger in doing this stuff," Bristow said.

If spice is manufactured with the pesticide, drug users risk illness or possibly death. No deaths are known locally to be a result of this, he said.

The sheriff's office said no arrests have been made but the investigation is ongoing.

"It's a very delicate ongoing investigation," Bristow said.

Tainted spice is nothing new, he added.

"Not all the time is it tainted with pesticides but it's tainted with something," Bristow said.

The Manatee County Substance Abuse Coalition is gathering research to better understand the spice problem in Manatee County.

"What we have been working on is a K2 spice survey to see if in fact it is an issue," said Dr. Jessica Spencer with Manatee County Substance Abuse Coalition. "We are having difficulty getting data."

The research is skewed, however, because they must rely on information from Manatee Glens treatment providers and through drug court.

"Certainly, marijuana is something we see in the vast majority of people that come to us for services," said Nester Levesque, director of the Manatee Glens adult outpatient center.

It is still difficult to distinguish if patients are using marijuana or the synthetic versions, he added.

"It certainly is an issue. It's creating problems for young people," Levesque said. "It's very dangerous."

Based on his experience, he said people have had negative reactions to synthetic drugs.

"What they are lacing this stuff with has been proven very dangerous," Levesque said.

Anyone with information about tainted spice can call the sheriff's office at 941-747-3011.