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Police See Increase in Abuse of Herbal Products

GRAND RAPIDS - Remember K2 and Spice, the products that looked like a potpourri that teens and young adults were smoking to get high? Even with state and federal laws banning it two years ago, similar products are now gaining in popularity. In recent months, deputies with the Kent County Sheriff's Department and Grand Rapids Police Officers say they have seen an increase in sale and abuse of a synthetic, marijuana-like substance, under several new brand names. Manufacturers have found a loophole to continue to sell these items by making slight variations of the substance.

In 2010, the Michigan Legislature made it illegal to sell the chemicals found in many of these products, but slight molecular changes have put similar products back on store shelves, being marketed as potpourri. These herbal products are legally sold at a variety of retail outlets, in some smoke shops, and over the Internet. Labels mark that these products are "not for human consumption" and "not for sale to minors," yet police say they are seeing abuse of these items, particularly by teens and young adults, who think smoking it will give them the same type of 'high' as marijuana.

"Kent County deputies say they are getting calls from schools and concerned parents, and police in Grand Rapids tell us they have seen 30 cases in the past month alone," says Cathy Raevisky, Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. "We need parents to talk to their children about these products, and explain that these chemicals can lead to serious side effects, such as elevated heart rates, vomiting, disorientation and convulsions."

Police say they've seen one case involving a 12 year old child abusing the product. Often, tests on these products show they are just slightly modified from substances banned in 2010 by lawmakers, and police must close out the case without issuing any charges. We at the Kent County Health Department recommend parents talk to their children about the dangers of these so-called 'synthetic marijuana'-type drugs.

Please see attached photo of products recently tested by police.

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.