

Time to face yet another drug threat

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Oh, boy, this is just what we need.

In a week when The Associated Press reported that Kentucky had the fourth most methamphetamine lab seizures in the nation last year (not the kind of Final Four we aim for), local authorities went public with the threat here from something called "synthetic marijuana."

The stuff goes by various names. Among them K2, K3, Mad Hatter, Happy Hour and Triple X. Shows how out of touch I am. I thought K2 was a tall, pointy mountain in Asia, the Mad Hatter ran a haberdashery in Wonderland and Triple X was a really nasty movie.

The names and formulas are constantly changing, but these "synthetic cannabinoids" are a serious and dangerous business.

"About three years ago, I saw my first case of K2 involving a gentleman age 60," Dr. Robert Fawcett, a Methodist Hospital ER physician, told Henderson Fiscal Court last week. "He was found lying face down in the mud. He had to be resuscitated.... I had to do a scan to check out his heart because he had arrhythmia — all to do with smoking this drug.

"I've also seen children, teenagers and young adults who come into the ER, either agitated, paranoid or with psychotic type symptoms from smoking this drug.... A lot of the patients are belligerent, abusive to the staff.... It's caused some kids to have medical problems — problems with rehab and bringing out a psychotic break.

"I saw my first case three years ago. Now we see about three a month."

The chemical-coated herb mixtures are available over the counter around here. Well, maybe not "over the counter" since many stores apparently keep it under the counter or in a back room, but it's easily available.

Restricting its sale is difficult because it's a moving target as far as makeup.

"They keep changing the chemicals in it," Henderson County Sheriff's Department Detective Bill Mills told the court. "Some of it has the effect of methamphetamine, some has the effect of cocaine, some mimics marijuana. The person's body chemistry has an

effect on it too. Some people take it and react like to marijuana. We've had some cases, they fall out in the street and go into convulsions.

"We had one in our ER who after smoking it, he went into convulsions and hallucinations and wanted to kill everyone in his family," Mills said. "I'm getting several calls a week from citizens and from people who've used it and they say, 'You have to do something. You've got to get this stuff stopped.'"

After hearing these stories, fiscal court last week moved to do just that, passing on the first reading an ordinance to prohibit the possession and trafficking of synthetic marijuana.

Several other Kentucky counties and cities already have such laws on the books. The state of Kentucky and many other states have tried to address the problem, and there has been discussion of federal intervention. But our state and federal governments move pretty slowly.

"The Commonwealth of Kentucky has made a certain portion of these types of substances illegal," County Attorney Steve Gold told the court. "Well, the law was passed. So manufacturers tweaked it a little bit and next thing you know, what they're selling has, in some situations, worse effects than what was just made illegal.

"They are trying to stay ahead of the law, and the state legislature takes awhile to make their laws. Which is one of the reasons we are coming to fiscal court today to ask if the process can be made a little bit quicker and we can keep up with manufacturers on a county level."

Gold also hopes that after last week's action local business owners will take it upon themselves "to stop selling the stuff." That would be an excellent result.

We can argue another time about whether our society's long-standing prohibition on natural marijuana has given rise to this dangerous new synthetic variety.

At this point let's just get it off the shelves.



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