

SE News  
HD **HIGH RISK IN DEADLY HABIT**  
BY Peter Michael  
WC 759 words  
PD 17 August 2014  
SN Courier Mail  
SC COUMAI  
ED CourierMail  
PG 9  
LA English  
CY © 2014 News Limited. All rights reserved.

LP

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION SYNTHETIC drug tzars are cashing in on the lucrative illicit black market trade in Queensland, turning over tens of **millions** of dollars a year.

One self-described “entrepreneur” reportedly raked in \$30,000 a day last year before his business was busted by police.

TD

The new counterculture was previously able to exploit legal loopholes to give users a mind-altering high by changing the chemical makeup of synthetic drugs to keep ahead of police.

The State Government closed the loophole in April 2013, imposing a blanket ban on possessing or selling substances other than alcohol, tobacco and food that have substantially the same effect as a dangerous drug.

But a Sunday Mail special investigation has found stores throughout the state are still openly selling illicit “psychoactive” drugs which mimic marijuana, cocaine, LSD and ecstasy in a disturbing new trend.

These illegal synthetic drugs are discreetly being sold over-the-counter alongside adult porn, love potions and lingerie.

Police describe the drugs as “poison”.

Health experts warn the synthetic molecules are often unknown and untested, with some having up to 100 times the active ingredient in illicit drugs such as cannabis, making users “guinea pigs” and “crash-test dummies”.

Sex shop owners, along with tobacconists and alternative stores, behind the colossal online trade are still the main suppliers despite new laws banning their **sale** in Queensland four months ago, The Sunday Mail can reveal.

Synthetic cannabis – sold under the code name “tea” – was available from a store in the tropical party town of Airlie Beach for \$80 for a three-gram packet of a potpourri-like substance.

The Sunday Mail investigation found the **sale** of leafy highs, pills and powders was not confined to partygoers and tourists on the glitter strips of Brisbane, the **Gold** Coast, Whitsundays and Cairns. The “dot bong boom” is also popular in the **mining** towns of Mackay and Mount Isa and the defence garrison city of Townsville, where workers use synthetic drugs to dodge in-house drug tests.

In four years, the sales of “mimic drugs” has gone from zero to a multimillion-dollar underground industry, marketing up to 200 different brands of psychoactive drugs, authorities say.

A spate of deaths linked to synthetic drug use – including at least six recent cases in North Queensland alone – is under investigation by the Queensland Coroner.

Hospital staff across the Sunshine State also cite an alarming spike in cases of synthetic drug users who turn up in emergency wards suffering psychosis, paranoia, and organ failure.

Doctors and experts at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, headed by Dr Lucy Burns, say the synthetic drug trade is a rapidly evolving phenomena in Australia.

"There are many horror stories," Queensland Police synthetic drug expert Adam Frost said.

"Our biggest concern is often we don't know what the hell is in this stuff. "Users are literally the laboratory rats, the guinea pigs, for the effects of these constantly changing mimic drugs.

"Some can be mild. Others can be dangerous, and sometimes deadly." Synthetic drugs can be packaged as party pills, love potions, herbal highs, bath salts and even plant food.

They come in a range of flavours, including bubblegum, marketed with brand names such as K2, Black Mamba, Smacked, Spice, Minga and N-Bombs.

One sex shop owner, who sells synthetic drugs, told The Sunday Mail: "Some people like to get high, f---ed up or off their face.

"If they go to a shop, buy a bottle of Drano and stick it up their nose, then surely that is their choice," said the owner, who asked not to be named.

"But if they do get f---ed up, get sick or die, then they reap the consequences of their own actions." Spanish tourist Sophia, 26, on the "Go Troppo" trail from Sydney to Cairns, said synthetic drugs were popular on the backpacker party scene.

"It's easy to find, if you know where to look, and what to ask for," she said. "I tried some different stuff but it's not really my thing. I didn't like it much.

"I've heard too many bad stories." Illegal herbal products, in the case of synthetic cannabis, are sprayed with chemically engineered substances similar to tetrahydrocannabinol, the active ingredient in marijuana. Producers of these substances, some traced back to factories in **China**, sell in bulk on the web, ship by postal courier, and tweak molecules to thwart detection by police scientists and stay off the UN banned chemicals list.

**NS** gdrug : Drug Trafficking/Dealing | gcat : Political/General News | gcrim : Crime/Courts | gtraff : Trafficking/Smuggling  
**RE** austr : Australia | queensl : Queensland | apacz : Asia Pacific | ausnz : Australia/Oceania  
**PUB** News Ltd.  
**AN** Document COUMAI0020140817ea8h0003t