

Herbal incense K2 legal in North Carolina but not at Elon University

by Anna Johnson, April 6, 2010

The herbal incense K2 is legal in North Carolina, but human consumption of the synthetic cannabinoid is against Elon University's drug policy.

With similar effects to those of marijuana, K2 is a human-manufactured drug that has floated across Europe and the United States since the mid-1990s. Chemicals JWH-018 and JWH-073, not Tetrahydrocannabinol, the active ingredient in marijuana, cause the high-induced state.

In the past year, K2 has gained popularity across college campuses. The substance has a high similar to marijuana but can also produce hallucinations, vomiting and aggression.

Whitney Gregory, coordinator of judicial affairs, said she couldn't comment on individual cases involving the substance but she did say that K2 had been brought to their attention.

"The way our handbook is written, certainly the possession of illegal drugs is a violation," Gregory said. "But that also includes using drugs not as directed."

She said K2 was not meant for human consumption. Thus a student caught ingesting K2 would face a possible drug violation.

"It's just like spray paint," she said. "You can possess spray paint but if you were to huff the can of spray paint, that would be using it not as directed."

John Huffman, the creator of JWH-018, said in a WebMD.com article the chemicals found in K2 have never been tested on humans. He also said there was no current research on what side effects could be caused by the drug.

Chuck Gantos, director of Campus Safety and Police, said the drug is not a major problem at Elon but "once something gets out and someone makes money from it, things could change"

K2 does not show up on most drug tests. Gantos said since the drug is legal and the department is not searching for the drug.

"I do understand in some states they are making K2 illegal," Gantos said. "It took just a couple of months for this to become an item of interest in this part of the country."

Brian Collins, associate director of residence life, said if a student were caught smoking K2 in the dorms it would be a violation just for smoking in an academic building.

"K2 is not something we've been coming across," Collins said. "It comes in a package that looks like incense and it is a white powder. It is possible we've come across the chemical and not known what it is. But we are not seeing packages of K2 in the halls."

The federal Drug Enforcement Administration has classified it as "a drug or chemical of concern." Kansas banned the substance earlier this month and Missouri, Illinois, Utah, Kentucky, Georgia, North Dakota and Tennessee have all expressed interest in banning the substance.