

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Youth Are Unaware that “Fry” May Contain PCP

Increases in marijuana use over the past several years have stimulated unique use patterns, such as the smoking of **fry**, marijuana cigarettes (joints) or cigars (blunts) soaked in embalming fluid. The use of this substance reached epidemic proportions in Connecticut in 1993-94, and reports of fry use began to emerge in Texas around the same time. In an effort to increase knowledge about this trend, the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) recently commissioned a study of fry use in the metropolitan Houston area.¹

According to the study, fry is most often purchased as **fry sticks** (joints dipped in embalming fluid) or **fry sweets** (blunts dipped in embalming fluid). Other slang names include **amp**, **water-water**, **wetdaddy**, and **wack**. The slang names for this drug are so commonly used that the actual composition of the drug is often obscured. One youth interviewed “swore she smoked fry, not marijuana and embalming fluid, because, ‘I’ve heard what that stuff [embalming fluid] can do, and I’m not going to touch it’” (p. 6).

The reported immediate effects of smoking fry include hallucinations, feelings of panic, paranoia and disorientation, and intense anger, which the adolescents interviewed attributed to marijuana and formaldehyde (one of the primary components of embalming fluid). However, neither marijuana nor formaldehyde typically results in the psychedelic effects described by the adolescents. After testing a sample of embalming fluid compound obtained from a Houston drug dealer, the researchers discovered that the compound sold as embalming fluid **also contained the hallucinogen PCP**.

Neither the people who diverted embalming fluid (typically from chemical companies or funeral homes), the dealers, nor the users reported any suspicion or knowledge of PCP or any other psychoactive substance as an ingredient in fry.² This ignorance is not only problematic for users (who may experience unanticipated hallucinations), but also for treatment providers who may be “hampered from knowing how to [appropriately] treat people who overdosed or who are suffering from long-term effects” (p. 1). The author of the study suggests that “marijuana smokers need to know that adulterated marijuana may contain another, hazardous substance that can put them at extreme, immediate risk of adverse effects” and recommends that treatment providers be made aware that clients who report smoking cigarettes dipped in embalming fluid may have also consumed PCP (p. 14).

¹Interviews were conducted with knowledgeable community members (i.e., law enforcement, funeral home employees, treatment providers) and with 20 adolescents (ages 15-22) who reported smoking embalming fluid with marijuana in the month prior to their interview. The small convenience sample used may not reflect the use of fry among all adolescents in the Houston metropolitan area.

²Researchers theorize that distributors add PCP to the fluid before selling it to street dealers, although they were unable to confirm this.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from William Elwood, “Fry:” *A Study of Adolescents’ Use of Embalming Fluid with Marijuana and Tobacco*, Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research Brief, February 1998. Copies of the report are available from TCADA at www.tcada.state.tx.us/research/fry.html or 800-832-9623.