

“Red Rock Opium” Does Not Contain Opium

CESAR’s most recent round of Drug Scan interviews revealed the availability of a substance called “red rock opium” in Anne Arundel, Baltimore and Carroll counties and Baltimore City. Nationally, the substance has also been encountered in New York, Virginia, and Florida. The substance is described as a reddish-brown crystal-like material that is hard, glossy, and easily crushed. “Red rock opium” is also referred to as “red rum” and “red stuff,” and is often believed to contain opium. According to Drug Scan reports, “red rock opium” is most commonly used by marijuana smokers who smoke the two substances combined. Individuals have reported the effects to be “mildly hallucinogenic” but “not like true opium.” However, it is unclear how the specific effects of “red rock opium” may be enhanced or altered due to the combined use with marijuana.

Information published in “Drugs and the Law” by Gould Publications indicates that “red rock” is a type of heroin manufactured in the Philippines that has been combined with barbitol, strychnine, and caffeine. However, laboratory analysis of samples of “red rock opium” received in Virginia, Maryland and through the DEA’s Special Testing and Research Laboratory revealed a very different composition. In nearly every case, chemical analysis uncovered the compound dracorhodin, which is found in the plant *Daemonorops draco*, commonly known as Dragon’s Blood.

The ripe berries of the Dragon’s Blood plant are covered with a reddish resin that can be separated from the berries by steaming or shaking. Dragon’s Blood resin is used as a coloring agent in varnishes and stains and as an herbal medicine. It is also used in occult rituals and to make Dragon’s Blood incense, which is available in stores catering to occult interests. Forensic analysis of Dragon’s Blood incense and “red rock opium” found that the materials were basically the same, despite slight variations in individual components.

Thus, it appears that the substance known in this area as “red rock opium” contains a derivative of Dragon’s Blood rather than opium. Unfortunately, the pharmacological and toxicological effects, if any, of Dragon’s Blood are not currently well defined. The material is neither a controlled nor a regulated substance. However, it is clearly not opium.

SOURCE: A complete list of sources is available on the DEWS website (www.cesar.umd.edu/DEWS.html).

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