

Not-So-Sweet Leaf

Fake pot is a dangerous scam, according to one head shop customer

The giant pot leaf on the cover of the Nov. 4 Time magazine caught Cheryl Rogers' eye, and piqued her interest.

The 49-year-old is no stranger to the allure of marijuana, and was particularly interested in the story's brief reference to a synthetic version. Though slated to be outlawed at the end of this month, so-called synthetic marijuana — sold under names like K2, Blaze and Kryptonite — remains available at area head shops, including Rogers' preferred store, Glass Eye on Lane Avenue.

Rogers says she went to the shop, which sells smoking accessories and sex toys, and specifically mentioned the Time magazine story. She says she asked if they carried synthetic marijuana, and that the clerk affirmed they did. He showed her several varieties, packaged in small bags ranging in price from \$30 to \$140. Rogers, who wasn't wearing her glasses at the time, says she asked the clerk if people smoked it like regular marijuana. She claims he responded, "Smoke it like however you want — pipe, bong, roll it, however."

Rogers left with a small bag of a product called Spyder, paying \$30 for 3 grams. When she got home, however — and got her glasses — she noticed right away that the label said "Not For Human Consumption." Rogers smoked some anyway, and says the sensation was horrible. "It burns. It tastes awful. It smells like potpourri," she says. "It's basically incense."

Rogers was herself incensed, and headed back to the store for a refund. Employees there refused, citing a blanket no-returns policy, and denying that anyone there had ever referenced the item as "synthetic marijuana" or suggested it should be smoked.

"It's herbal incense," says a store employee familiar with Rogers' complaint, who declined to give his name. "We sell herbal incense. She came in asking for it, and she knew exactly what she was getting."

Rogers vehemently disputes this, noting that she would never have shelled out \$30 for

a bag of incense. But she says her complaint is about more than just money. She believes the store is engaging in "dirty, bad business" by selling a harmful product to customers. "There must've been 15 people who came in and bought it while I was there," says Rogers. "And not once did anyone say, 'This is unsafe to smoke.' This is the biggest scam going."

Scam or no, it won't be around much longer. In response to a surge of complaints about the health effects of synthetic marijuana, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency passed an

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emergency ban this month on the chemicals used to make it. The ban takes effect Dec. 25, and will last a year, during which time the DEA will decide if the substances should be permanently classified as Schedule I drugs (the same category as LSD, Ecstasy, heroin and marijuana). In the meantime, stores like Glass Eye are offering a deal: Buy two, and get one free.

Rogers isn't buying. "Marijuana is natural, you know what you're going to get," she says. "This is nothing but chemical-laced incense."

Makes one positively nostalgic for the days when "fake pot" was just a bag of oregano. □

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Like all forms of synthetic marijuana, this bag of Spyder is labeled "not for human consumption."

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