



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
Supported By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



April 2009 – Salvia Divinorum

District Judge Leslie Dutchcot serves district 49-2-01 and presides over cases of College, Ferguson, Halfmoon, and Patton townships. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

Imagine that, on a weekday afternoon, your teenager and some friends want to “hang out” at your house. They are “good kids” and you have no concerns about alcohol or illegal drug use, but what about legal drugs? Do you know about salvia divinorum, also known as “sally,” “magic mint” or “diviner’s sage”? Salvia is a type of sage and part of the mint family. It is easily available, unregulated and currently legal in Pennsylvania. Locally, salvia has been discovered by teenagers and young adults as an experimental drug.

Salvia was historically used in Mexico under the supervision of Mazatec shamans to induce “revelations,” but in the past 10 years, the drug has become popular with teens and college-aged people around the country. Salvia is available as dried leaves or in an extract form. Since it is a leaf that is smoked, salvia is often mischaracterized as a legal substitute for marijuana. Salvia is unlike marijuana; salvia is a hallucinogenic drug more similar to LSD or psilocybin mushrooms. The active ingredient, Salvinorin-A, is widely regarded by biochemists as one of the most addictive substances known to man.

Effects of salvia include the following:

- Loss of physical coordination
- Uncontrollable laughter
- Visual alterations or visions
- Experiencing multiple realities
- Dream-like veneer over the world
- Sense of total confusion or madness
- Seeing or becoming part of a tunnel
- Loss of sense of awareness as an individual
- Sense of flying, floating, twisting, or turning
- Feeling of being immersed in an energy field
- Feeling of being connected to a larger “whole”
- Feeling of being underground or underwater
- Appearing to travel to other places and/or times
- Becoming inanimate objects (a wall, stairs, a couch, etc.)

User descriptions of the smell of burning salvia run the gamut from “burning tea” to “rotting flesh.”

Salvia’s effects are personal and self-contained. The role of friends during salvia use is to act as safety monitors rather than to share a group experience. Internet users recommend having “sober sitters” present during the experience. A “YouTube” search for salvia lists over seven thousand video clips of individuals who filmed

themselves under its influence. “Sitters” watch and film as users laugh uncontrollably, shriek in terror and roll around under salvia’s hallucinogenic effects.

If salvia is legal, why worry? The extraction process is not standardized and the dried leaves may contain contaminants like wax, tar and oils. Salvia is stronger than people think and it may become a hard habit to break. When used too often in a short period of time the salvia experience may become more difficult to obtain. The long-term effects are unknown and use may stunt brain function and affect development. Finally, the effects of salvia are compounded by underage drinking in some groups of friends.

A ban in Pennsylvania is under consideration. Ohio banned salvia in January 2009. Once banned, salvia would be classified with other controlled substances like heroin, morphine and LSD.

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