



Drug Alert Watch

Resurgence in Abuse of 'Purple Drank'

U . S . D E P A R T M E N T O F J U S T I C E

EWS Report 000008

February 15, 2011

This SENTRY Watch is based on source materials that have not been validated and/or researched by the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC). It is intended to serve as an immediate alert to law enforcement and public health officials of potential substance abuse.

Law enforcement authorities and treatment providers primarily in Houston and San Antonio (TX), Alabama, and other areas of the southern United States, are reporting that abuse of a readily available prescription-strength cough syrup containing promethazine (an antihistamine antiemetic) and codeine (a prescription opioid) appears to be increasing. This cough syrup is the main ingredient in a drink mixture commonly known as Purple Drank. Effects of Purple Drank are consistent with the abuse characteristics of other opioids and result in a sedative and woozy or swooning euphoria. The narcotic drink mixture is highly addictive and has contributed to overdose deaths.



To produce Purple Drank, abusers typically mix cough syrup that contains promethazine and codeine with carbonated lemon-lime soda and pieces of hard candy. The appearance of Purple Drank can vary significantly in color, as some individuals substitute other ingredients to suit their personal preferences. For example, some users replace carbonated soda with juice drinks or sports drinks, while others add alcohol to the mixture. In addition to Purple Drank, the potent mixture also is known by various street names including *lean*, *sizzurp*, *syrup*, or *Texas tea*, and less commonly as *purple jelly*, *purple stuff*, *purple tonic*, *sip-sip*, *oil*, *player potion*, *purp*, and *barre*.

Purple Drank used in combination with other drugs can result in death. Abuse of Purple Drank has contributed to a limited number of overdose deaths over the past 10 years, allegedly including the Texas man widely credited with popularizing the mixture. In addition, abusers blame Purple Drank and other similar mixtures for causing constipation, dental decay, urinary tract infections, and weight gain, among other effects. Prescription-strength promethazine and codeine cough syrup is legitimately used to treat allergies, bronchitis, the common cold, influenza, and sinusitis.

Other cough syrups available over-the-counter are sometimes mixed with alcohol and abused in the same manner as the prescription-strength cough syrup typically used for the Purple Drank concoction. Moreover, several legal soft drinks have capitalized on the reputation of Purple Drank. Although these soft drinks do not contain controlled substances, the marketing of these drinks to teens and young adults may serve as a gateway to Purple Drank.

History of Purple Drank
Used since the 1960s primarily in and around the Houston area, Purple Drank also has been prevalent in other areas of the south. The mixture enjoyed a revival in the 1990s. A 2007 music album and a song titled *Purple Drank* and other recordings and music videos by hip-hop and rap artists appeared to glamorize and promote the mixture.

Posted: February 15, 2011

Photo Credit: Nebraska State Patrol

POC: SENTRY Management Team, www.justice.gov/ndic/sentry or (814) 532-5888

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