

Nine Stillwater prison employees hospitalized after exposure to synthetic marijuana

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- [IZZY CANIZARES, BRING ME THE NEWS, SEP 20, 2024](#)

Nine employees at Minnesota Correctional Facility–[Stillwater](#) were taken to the hospital on Thursday after being exposed to a "stronger-than-expected" dose of synthetic marijuana being smoked by an inmate, causing them to fall ill.

One employee at MCF-Stillwater responded to a report of a man smoking an unknown substance in his cell at 7:44 a.m. After responding to the incident, the staff member began to feel lightheaded and nauseous, and had an increased heart rate. He was taken by ambulance to Lakeview Hospital.

Three staff members reported experiencing similar reactions and were taken to the hospital shortly after that. Later, three other staff responding to the incident began feeling ill, and two were taken to the hospital.

A separate incident in the same unit caused three more staffers to be taken to the hospital after feeling ill when an inmate threw a container with an unknown substance from his cell that landed near to them.

Nine MCF-Stillwater staff members were taken to the hospital for evaluation; all but one were taken by paramedics. One member was given the anti-opioid medication Narcan when they began to experience symptoms. As of Thursday afternoon, all staff members have been treated and released.

The DOC's Office of Special Investigations is actively investigating the substance and how the contraband was introduced into the prison.

The man who was caught smoking told investigators he had smoked a "stronger-than-expected" dose of synthetic K-2 marijuana. While investigators have not completed testing, recent investigations have identified the presence of the designer drug [MDMB-4en-PINACA](#), soaked into paper and dried.

"These synthetic substances are particularly dangerous because the chemical properties that comprise them are unknown and uncontrolled," said Minnesota Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell. "We are prioritizing our investigative efforts to identify and prosecute those responsible for conspiring to introduce these substances into the secure correctional environment."

PINACA is an indazole-based synthetic cannabinoid that can be bought online and could have been introduced into the facility through the mail.

The AFSCME Council 5 and Local 915 unions released a statement regarding the incident, calling for "urgent and immediate action" to stop these drugs from being introduced into these correctional facilities.

"These dangerous situations are all too common, and our correctional staff are paying the price," AFSCME Council 5 and Local 915 President at MCF-Oak Park Heights Jeff Vars said. "Our union is calling for direct action to stop these from happening going forward."