

# NRG brand masks illegal mephedrone sales

EXCLUSIVE

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A series of banned drugs are being sold disguised as 'legal high' brands like NRG-1, tests have revealed.

Most NRG-1 or NRG-2 branded products tested in separate studies by police, academics and drug user forums contained recently outlawed Class B drugs including mephedrone, flephedrone, MDPV and butylone – despite claiming to contain the legal substance naphyrone. The findings mean users and head shops are unwittingly at risk of legal penalties for the possession or supply of Class B drugs.

In the wake of the government's mephedrone ban coming in to force in April, NRG-1 was one of the first products to be marketed as a 'new legal alternative'. At first the chemical makeup of NRG was not clear but it was later widely advertised as containing naphyrone – a claim disputed by a series of tests released in June and July.

A joint study by academics at Liverpool John Moores University, Lancaster University and the University of Liverpool tested 17 different products labelled as 'legal high' brands – including NRG-1 and NRG-2. Testing revealed that 5 of the 13 'NRG' branded substances were actually mephedrone, sometimes adulterated with caffeine or the dental anaesthetic benzocaine. Four 'NRG' samples contained a combination of MDPV with either butylone or flephedrone – all of which are Class B drugs. Just one of the products tested contained naphyrone.

The findings echo analyses by Drugforum, an online drug user community, and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, both of which found that most samples of NRG-1 contained MDPV. Likewise, recent tests of 6 NRG-1 samples conducted by Tictac Communication at St George's Medical School in London, found that most samples contained a combination of butylone and MDPV although batches purchased at the Glastonbury music festival in June were shown to contain naphyrone as advertised.

"It's difficult to say for sure and it's changing over time but it looks like some labs might be using labels like 'NRG-1' to offload old stocks of the cathinone-



derivative 'legal highs' that were banned earlier this year, such as mephedrone, butylone and MDPV," Dr John Ramsey, who heads up TicTac's testing programme, told *Druglink*. "The point is that it looks like a lot of headshops are selling Class B drugs, and some users are buying them, without necessarily knowing it."

One producer at a Chinese chemical lab who sells a substance labelled by vendors as NRG-1 or Energy-1, wouldn't reveal the chemical make-up of the drug and claimed it to be legal, but admitted to *Druglink* that he has deliberately misled sellers into believing that the new drug is naphyrone.

"Some people say on internet forums that they guess it is naphyrone, but it is not true," he tells *Druglink*. "They ask me what it is and I don't want to tell the truth so I say it is naphyrone, they put it on their website and then every one says Energy1=naphyrone."

The Drug-forum report describes the misrepresentation of NRG-1 as "an extremely concerning development" and warns users to avoid "all such branded chemicals for the foreseeable future".

"These may be entirely different substances, with varying safety profiles and differing effects. [It] demonstrates both a lack of morals on the part of the chemical manufacturers, and a lack of quality control by their wholesalers," the report states.

According to Tictac, the 'branding' legal highs to disguise controlled substances has also appeared in the market for Spice-type synthetic cannabis mixtures. In December 2009 the government announced it was banning Spice and 17 synthetic cannabinoids as Class B drugs. Since the Spice ban, Tictac has tested 12 samples of smoking products available, all advertised as 'legal' but actually containing the banned cannabinoids.

## DRUGS QUOTE

**Jack (Straw) wasn't the worst of the Labour home secretaries – I think David Blunkett and John Reid got wildly over-excited.. [They] had a chequebook in one hand and the Daily Mail in the other."**

Justice Secretary Ken Clarke speaking on the *Today* programme about 'intelligent sentencing' and criticising Labour's record on prisons.

**"In England they always try out new mobile phones in the Isle of Man. They've got a captive society. You should try the legalisation of all drugs on the Isle of Man and see what happens."**

Rolling Stone Mick Jagger with an interesting suggestion for the self-governing British island in the Irish Sea.

**"If your child was offered drugs such as these, wouldn't you be aghast at such a let-off for the supplier?"**

The *News of the World* responds to criticism from a judge who said that it entrapped the father of Chelsea and England footballer John Terry as he supplied a reporter with cocaine.

**"People snorting coke in Europe are killing the pristine forests of the Andean countries and corrupting governments in west Africa"**

UN drugs chief Antonio Maria Costa dramatically paints cocaine users as enemies of the environment and democracy.