

It's Just a Vape Pen, Right?

By: Officer Jermaine Galloway, aka Tall Cop Says Stop

Vape pens are sweeping the country, but what we are quickly finding out (and many still don't know) is what is actually inside those vape pens. First, there are no absolutes when you talk a vape pen or e-cigarette. There are vapes that work for nicotine, flavored oils without nicotine, marijuana and even synthetics. Many people are vaping marijuana, right in front of you, and you may have no idea. Therein lies the rub.

Now, we are not saying that everyone is smoking drugs out of vape pens. Most likely, the majority of the vape pens contain products that you believe are inside of the pen. A lot of us on the street are finding that many are using them for drugs.

Last year (January/February 2014, Volume 23, No. 1) I wrote an article on the use of marijuana concentrates and their popularity. Marijuana concentrates and vape pens are the perfect marriage. Concentrates come in oil, wax or crystal form and the current version of vape pens can work for all three. Here is where the hurdles occur. You can't simply look at someone smoking from a vape pen and know what is inside. That is virtually impossible.

So, how can you figure out what someone is actually smoking? First, we need to understand these pens a little better. **The baseline when dealing with vape pens is there are NO ABSOLUTES.** Many of the pens that you see that are being used for nicotine look similar to some of the pens in the drug world and vice / versa. When we were first introduced to vape pens, many of us learned an electric device vaporizes a liquid form of nicotine. Many of the various forms of nicotine are found in vape shops, convenience stores, gas stations, grocery outlets, and even alcohol outlets depending on the state.

Over the last few years, vape pens for drug use have become popular. As mentioned earlier these pens can look like nicotine-based pens. They can be colorful, small and very discrete, with the latter being a large selling point to these various pens. **Imagine: sitting in class, at a stop light next to a police car, in a dance club or even in a movie theater taking a hit of a drug and no one around you even suspects**

drug use? Or sitting in a class room and the professor turns their back for a few seconds as they write on the dry erase board....meanwhile the person next to you is “vaping” but in actuality are taking a hit of something. What is that something you ask? If it is a drug, there is a good chance, it is marijuana.

So how can this be done and others might not detect it? As mentioned in the previous article, marijuana concentrates can be hard to detect, carry very little odor and are not a green, leafy substance. Once you place these various forms of marijuana into a quality vape pen, that pen can produce little to no odor thereby reducing or eliminating the known odor of marijuana. Furthermore, the user is receiving a stronger high. Also, any odor that is present, and the lingering smell of marijuana, is reduced, again making it hard to detect.

What are some ways that you could know what type of pen is being used? First, would be to open it. Inside of the pen you might see a raised wick surrounded by a coil, or a flat coil or just a cylinder. The packed or used residue of the product will be inside these areas. Wax inside of a vape pen will generally test with law enforcement kits. Also, if the pen had been recently smoked, there sometimes will be the odor of smoked marijuana coming from inside of the pen. Please note: A closed pen, with wax on the inside, will produce very little to no smell. Also, if you choose to open it, I would recommend wearing gloves as you don't know the extraction method or what else it might contain.

Through my own personal experience as a police officer, or from the over 80,000 attendees I have trained, here is what we seem to be finding the most on the street (traffic stops, schools, hospitals, and other public places): Dry herbal marijuana, marijuana, wax, marijuana oil and oil forms of synthetic drugs.

One very telling, and alarming, story was from a police officer in the Midwest area of the United States. He said he was sitting in his patrol car and an individual walked up to him. He didn't get into much detail of the contact with the individual except to say that the individual was highly agitated. Ultimately, the officer arrested the individual and during a conversation with him asked him “What he was on?” referring to his drug impairment. The individual admitted to smoking “wax” the night before, from a vape pen. I have received similar stories from law enforcement across the US.

I am not saying that everyone exhibits these symptoms but there have been several instances of behaviors similar to someone on amphetamines or hallucinogens.

In the end, vape pens are hard to identify, offer a new way of use, are VERY discrete, produce less of an odor and therefore can make some means of drug use easier to use and more mobile. With all that being said there are no absolutes and

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