



215 Rice Street
P.O. Box 20,000
Grand Junction, CO 81502

970-244-3500 Phone
970-244-3503 Fax
www.sheriff.mesacounty.us

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“Carfentanil Warning for EMS and Law Enforcement Personnel”

There is a potent drug (opioid) called Carfentanil that is being mixed with heroin or being sold as heroin. It is cheap and easy to order on the internet. It is legally made in China and can be purchased on the internet for \$3800 per kilogram. A kilogram is approximately 50,000 doses that are currently being sold on the streets for \$10 a dose. Carfentanil is 10,000 times stronger than morphine. Whereas heroin or other opioids can cause users to stop breathing, Carfentanil will cause users to stop breathing and is toxic to the heart, causing arrhythmias, and toxic to the brain causing brain cell death. Carfentanil can be absorbed through the skin, inhaled if in the air, or enter through any mucous membrane (i.e. eyes, nose, or mouth). An entry team of eleven law enforcement officers were all affected and required treatment after tossing a noise/light diversion device into an illegal lab prior to entering the building. The device aerosolized the Carfentanil powder and they inhaled the powder in the air.

Some street names for Carfentanil are: Apache, China girl, China white, dance fever, friend, goodfella, jackpot, murder 8, TNT, Tango, and Cash. According to the DEA, the fentanyl being sold on the street is produced illegally in Mexico, and also comes directly from China.

WHY IS THIS DRUG MANUFACTURED IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Veterinarians use Carfentanil (Trade name Wildnil) to anesthetize large animals. Only a few micrograms are needed to tranquilize an elephant. Veterinarians have a protocol to have the antidote, Narcan, drawn up and immediately available before they handle a syringe of Carfentanil. They also use eye protection, long sleeves, and gloves. Whereas 2 milligrams of Narcan can reverse the effects of heroin, it may take as much as 20 milligrams of Narcan to reverse the effects of Carfentanil.

HOW CAN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND EMS PROTECT THEMSELVES?

Some law enforcement agencies have discontinued field testing any white powder. The Ohio Bureau of Investigation has a protocol for collection of white powder evidence depending on whether it is packaged or in the open on a table or floor.

If the white powder is packaged, they use a double layer of protective gloves to seal the package inside two evidence bags. Then they put this into a paint can and seal the top prior to transporting the evidence to the lab.

If the powder is in the open, they back out of the area and handle the scene as a hazmat situation and the evidence is collected using a full protective suit, Level A, and SCBA.

Carfentanil is also being produced in pill form. Do not handle pills without a double layer of latex gloves. .

The DEA recommends Level A protection if Carfentanil is the suspected agent at any scene.

Obviously, police officers cannot wear a Level A hazmat suit when they investigate every drug crime, however, Keith Graves of PoliceOne.com news offers these 5 safety tips for cops:

1. **Understand that fentanyl (Carfentanil) can kill you.** Be wary of powders or pills because unscrupulous drug dealers mix it with heroin and press it into Vicodin pills.
2. **Know that these drugs are transdermal.** If you touch the heroin or Vicodin pill above, you can absorb the drug through your skin.
3. **Wear protective gear.** Never handle any drugs without latex gloves. If you are conducting a raid on a dealer of fentanyl, you should probably treat the raid as if you were hitting a clandestine drug lab.
4. **Do not field test suspected fentanyl.** If you are handling suspected fentanyl, you should not field test the drug under any circumstances.
5. **Implement a naloxone (Narcan) program in your agency.** If EMS is not on standby or near the scene, having naloxone on hand may save your life.

The Ohio Department of Public Safety published a document to EMS Medical Directors, EMS Agencies, and EMS Providers. Here are some excerpts from the document:

“The national opioid crisis has recently become more challenging due to an increase in the incidence of potent substances being mixed with heroin. Most notably, this includes fentanyl, Carfentanil, synthetic opioids (e.g. W-18), and methamphetamine. These substances require a shift in the paradigm of patient and responder safety and naloxone administration.”

“For the EMS community and non-medical first responders, the advent of these high potency opioids is cause for heightened situational awareness and a reiteration of the importance of personal protective equipment (PPE).”

“There is currently little information on the effects, absorption, or bioavailability of the powdered form of Carfentanil via topical contact to mucosal tissues or inhalation routes.”

“For those jurisdictions that are experiencing an increased evidence of overdose involving high potency opioids, consider the utilization of additional PPE that is appropriate to the patient scenario and the scene. This may include, but is not limited to, donning a second pair of latex gloves (or using nitrile gloves), a simple face mask, and eye protection.”

“Personal protective equipment only works if you wear it.”

Michael D. Hill, B.S., EMT-P
Mesa County EMS System Coordinator
Mesa County Sheriff's Office / OEM
215 Rice Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501
970-255-5078
Mike.Hill@mesacounty.us