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Printed and dyed marijuana rolling papers could pose health risks

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After discovering a study revealing alarming levels of heavy metal contamination in printed marijuana rolling papers, Custom Cones USA discarded its inventory and stopped producing them.

The study, conducted by researchers at Lake Superior State University, [analyzed 26 different elements](#) and found that printed papers contained significantly higher concentrations of metals such as copper, chromium and vanadium compared to their unprinted counterparts.

The discovery highlights a potential health risk, and cannabis business owners could be unknowingly exposing customers to unsafe levels of these contaminants.

Custom Cones USA is taking a [proactive stance to prioritize consumer safety](#) by discontinuing all printed rolling paper options.

The Renton, Washington-based company was about to start making rolling papers with hearts printed on them when Harrison Bard, CEO of Custom Cones USA, learned of the study and the health dangers printed papers pose.

Instead, Custom Cones USA now focuses on packaging and tips designed for specific brands.

“You don’t need inks and printing and pretty designs on your

rolling papers,” Bard said.

“It might lead to having a cooler picture on Instagram, but we owe consumers the education and trust that they’re buying a safe and reliable product.

“Consumers trust that if you’re selling it to me, it’s good.”

The soy marketing gimmick

Many manufacturers, particularly those overseas, market their printed papers as being made with soy-based inks.

Although that sounds appealing, it’s just a marketing gimmick that distracts from the truth: Printed rolling papers are still full of heavy metals.

Many consumers don’t realize that smoking accessories are not regulated anywhere near the level of tobacco products.

While cannabis itself undergoes rigorous testing in regulated states, the papers and wraps used to consume them are not.

Just because a product passes state regulations for cannabis doesn’t mean it’s safe for any potential smoking material or that the accessories are free from harmful byproducts when combusted.

Pennsylvania-based standards organization ASTM

International has formed a committee to create standards for pre-rolls, said Darwin Millard, technical director for St. Louis-

based compliance service Cannabis Safety & Quality and an active volunteer with ASTM, where he has taken the lead for the [development of many standards for the cannabis industry](#).

“We want to create specifications that address restricted substances in rolling papers and inhalation-grade adhesives,” Millard said. “Papers, glues and tips are the main focus.”

The regulatory vacuum is an issue.

Most online head shops or smoking accessory stores sell a variety of printed papers. Brands such as Edie Parker, Urban Outfitters and Beautiful Burns all feature printed papers.

Jordan Wellington, a partner in Colorado-based cannabis policy and public affairs firm Strategies 64, said state regulators typically require pre-rolls to be tested but typically do not require the rolling papers themselves to be tested.

After receiving reports in 2021 from licensed testing facilities [that some rolling papers contained metals](#), the Colorado Marijuana Enforcement Division encouraged licensees to work with the testing facilities to evaluate the materials being used to create pre-rolled joints.

“Outside of pre-rolls, Colorado state cannabis regulators are not provided with authority to regulate ancillary consumption devices because they’re not cannabis,” Wellington said.

“States may start looking at creating specific requirements

around printed papers in the regulated market.”

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A not-so-rosy option

Heavy metals in inks aren't the only concern when it comes to smoking joints. Rose petal wraps and cones also are concerning.

Roses are a cash crop, cultivated for their beauty and appearance, not for smoking.

That means they're often treated with pesticides, but no one

growing roses anticipates them being burned and inhaled.

When the pesticide-laced petals are combusted, they release other potentially harmful chemicals.

Another concerning product being used in joint tips are the foodstuff noodles, Millard said.

“That just means that now you need an allergen warning on your pre-roll,” he said.

“Anyone with a gluten intolerance will have an allergic reaction.”

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