



Elephant Tranquilizer Carfentanil Found in Houston

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Houston Forensic Science Center drug analysts confirmed a drug seized in the city is carfentanil, a highly potent and dangerous synthetic opioid made famous in popular culture as the T-Rex tranquilizer in the movie Jurassic Park.

The 80 milligrams of carfentanil seized in Houston is enough for at least 4,000 people to overdose. The drug is so potent its only real use in medicine is as an elephant tranquilizer.

"Everyday 90 people die of drug overdoses and many of them are tied to opioids. We must stop carfentanil and related synthetic opioids from entering our region, while we protect our first responders. We were able to get a handle on KUSH, now our focus has expanded to opioids, which are extremely deadly," said Mayor Sylvester Turner.

Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president, warned about the various ways these dangerous opioids are appearing on the streets.

"The public must be aware this drug is on the streets. This time, we received it in a crystalline form. However, across the country it is being added into clandestine pills, such as Xanax and Vicodin, and cut with heroin," Dr. Stout said.

"It takes only a dose the size of a grain of salt ingested, absorbed through the skin or inhaled to kill someone," he added. "This is especially dangerous to first responders and law enforcement officers working to keep Houston's streets safe."

HFSC has changed access points to its drug laboratory and is requiring analysts to wear additional protective gear when handling drug evidence in an attempt to keep staff safe.

HFSC, the Houston Police Department and the Harris County District Attorney's Office are also looking for ways to handle drugs differently in the street in order to protect officers and first responders.

HPD Chief Art Acevedo said there is a significant threat to law enforcement and other first responders who come into contact with fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances.

"I urge all first responders to treat any substance suspected to contain fentanyl with extreme caution because exposure to even a small amount can lead to significant health-related complications, respiratory depression or even death," the chief said.

"Officer safety is one my biggest concerns. I strongly urge each officer handling powder substances to use extreme caution when doing so. I want each officer to go home to his/her family safe and sound," Chief Acevedo added.

Paul Fortenberry, chief of the Major Narcotics Division in the Harris County District Attorney's Office, said prosecutors will use all laws available to fight these crimes.

"We are committed to disrupting and dismantling organizations that push these highly addictive and dangerous drugs," Mr. Fortenberry said. "We will utilize laws that are already on the books to hold accountable those that would destroy lives and families by unleashing these devastating substances."

Increasingly deadly and potent opioids have been found across the United States, creating a crisis for communities nationwide as they try to deal with significant addictions and deadly overdoses.

HFSC is a local government corporation that provides forensic services to the City of Houston and other local agencies. HFSC is overseen by a Board of Directors appointed by the Mayor of Houston and confirmed by the Houston City Council. Its management structure is designed to be responsive to a 2009 recommendation by the National

Academy of Sciences that called for crime laboratories to be independent of law enforcement and prosecutorial branches of government.

HFSC operates in seven forensic disciplines.

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