

EXHIBIT 29

9 Investigates:

Is kratom safe? Reported risks linked to legal kratom drinks

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ORLANDO, Fla — TikTok and Instagram are flooded with warnings from users about addiction and side effects from kratom products.

The Florida State Attorney General banned concentrated kratom products earlier this year, but there are several products like kratom drinks still legally sold in gas stations, smoke shops, and online.

They're often marketed as natural herbal drinks, powders or supplements. Behind all the wellness claims lies growing concern about kratom's opioid-like high and addictive grip.

9 Investigates why some forms are still readily available, when others are banned.

One Florida family told us, just because products legal, doesn't mean they're for everyone.

"He really lifted the energy of a room," said Rachel.

Kevin Oliveira's former partner Rachel says his uplifting acoustics captivated many. His Instagram is filled with videos of him singing and playing his guitar.

But in his final months, he used his voice for more than just singing.

“All I knew was, it was a natural herbal supplement - something to help me focus, energize and even relax,” Oliveira said on his Instagram page, KratomQuitters. “Little did I know this plant actually has a high potential for addiction and abuse.”

Rachel says before, Kevin was always focused on his health, cutting seed oils and even going gluten free.

Rachel says Kevin had been taking kratom powder and also experimented with stronger products that Florida has banned earlier this year like kratom extracts.

In 2022, Kevin said he overdosed and even posted about it on Instagram to warn others.

“Here’s my kratom overdose story,” said Oliveira in an Instagram video post.

Rachel says he tried cleaning up his life and was sober off and on but then returned to using a variety of kratom products.

“I knew that he was taking “Feel Free” regularly,” Rachel told 9 Investigates.

Feel Free is an energy drink which contains kratom. Its signature bright blue bottles are legal in Florida.

But Rachel says Kevin was hooked and tried multiple times to quit using it.

“The types of withdrawal symptoms that you get when you’re trying to quit kratom, it is no joke,” Rachel said.

The Medical Examiner ruled Kevin died as a result of “toxic effects of mitragynine,” the main component of kratom.

9 Investigates obtained Sheriff’s Office reports showing investigators found six empty bottles of Feel Free in a drawer next to Kevin along with two empty packages of this kratom powder in his backpack. Both products are still legal in Florida.

9 Investigates bought samples of Feel Free. It's readily available at gas stations and smoke shops across the state.

We traveled to this University of Florida drug lab to ask Professor Christopher McCurdy what's inside.

Lab tests confirmed two main ingredients: kava, the root of a plant in the pepper family, and natural kratom leaf.

McCurdy says in its native southeast Asia, kratom leaf is used like coffee to give people energy.

"But if you can consume it at higher levels, higher amounts, you'll get into this sort of more opioid-like effect," McCurdy said.

He says natural kratom leaf is less harmful than the concentrated, version that Florida banned earlier this year.

But he says any kratom leaf product can be addictive, and users can become physically dependent.

"One bottle works for a day, then suddenly they need 2 bottles or 3 bottles or 4. I've heard of people consuming as many as 20 bottles a day," McCurdy said.

The Federal Drug Administration has warned consumers not to use kratom, citing risks like "liver toxicity, seizures, substance use disorder, and in rare cases, death."

Seven states and Washington DC have banned kratom all together. Utah specifically banned the sale of Feel Free products because they mix kratom with kava.

"One thing that we're not well-versed on or understood scientifically is what does kratom and kava do together when you take them simultaneously?" McCurdy said.

“Would you warn people about using these products, like Feel Free?,” 9 Investigates asked.

“Oh absolutely, all kratom products,” McCurdy said.

9 Investigates contacted the maker of Feel Free, Botanic Tonics which says the products are “even safer than coffee in healthy adults”.

In a written statement, the company claimed Feel Free “has the strongest safety record of any kratom product on the market.”

But last year, after settling a class action lawsuit for more than \$8 million, Botanic Tonics changed its packaging to highlight the half-bottle dosage and warn users not to drink more than 1 bottle in 24 hours.

“If you’re heavily addicted to something, there’s no way in hell that you’re going to only drink half of it, even if it says half a bottle and the stuff is highly addictive,” Rachel said.

Rachel says the product shouldn’t be so easily available and wishes it was better regulated.

She hopes by sharing Kevin’s story, his voice will continue to make a difference.

“He had so many gifts to share with the world and he never really got to share them,” Rachel said.

The company told 9 Investigates the consumers who had bad reactions to Feel Free had taken too much of it.

In 2016, the Drug Enforcement Administration announced plans to categorize kratom as a schedule one drug but that never took effect.

We asked the Florida Attorney General’s Office if it plans to take further action beyond banning concentrated version of kratom but have not heard back.