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Independence Business Owner Sentenced for Distributing K2, Accepting Food Stamps

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – The owner of two Independence, Mo., stores was sentenced in federal court today for distributing synthetic cannabinoids, also known as K2, and for accepting food stamps as payment for K2.

Haq Nawaz Choudhry, 53, of Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. Chief District Judge Greg Kays to three years and six months in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered Choudhry to pay \$3,275 in restitution to the USDA and a money judgment and forfeiture to the government of \$27,443.

Choudhry is the president of H Habib Enterprises, Inc., which owned the Short Stop convenience store and Kerns Liquor, located next door to each other at 9013 E. U.S. 40 Highway in Independence and operated by Choudhry. On Feb. 6, 2018, Choudhry pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance and controlled substance analogue, and to participating in a money-laundering conspiracy.

An undercover Jackson County Drug Task Force detective and three people conducting undercover transactions on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture made a series of purchases from both Short Stop and Kerns from Feb. 14 to Oct. 22, 2013. The undercover purchases used cash on some occasions, and EBT cards (used to redeem Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP – benefits, also known as food stamps) on other occasions, to purchase synthetic cannabinoids.

During the course of the investigation Choudhry concealed the sale of synthetic cannabinoids by conducting financial transactions through the point-of-sale terminal, using EBT cards. The purchases would routinely be processed as “food purchases” with funds electronically deposited into the company’s bank account, thus concealing



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the proceeds of the synthetic cannabinoids sales. Choudhry specifically admitted, for example, that he fraudulently processed a \$46.50 purchase of synthetic cannabinoids using SNAP benefits on May 30, 2013.

Law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at Kern’s and Short Stop on Oct. 22, 2013. Officers recovered synthetic cannabinoids and drug paraphernalia from both businesses. Officers also seized \$21,135 from Short Stop and \$308 from Kerns. Choudhry was not present during the execution of the warrant. On Feb. 11, 2014, officers returned to Kerns and Short Stop based on a complaint that the business was selling K2 again. Choudhry was contacted and denied that any such sales were occurring, and gave written permission for the detectives and officers on scene to search both of his stores for illegal items. Officers recovered additional synthetic cannabinoids and drug paraphernalia from Kerns. Officers also seized \$6,000 from Kerns.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Adam Caine. It was investigated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General and the Independence, Mo., Police Department.

Topic(s):
Drug Trafficking

Component(s):
USAO - Missouri, Western

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