

Illegal drug smuggling through the post

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Factories in China have been identified as the chief suppliers of illegal synthetic drugs which are being smuggled into the Republic of Ireland through the postal service. The trade in these drugs has exploded since the products were banned after the closure of head shops in mid-2010.

Most of these drugs seized in the Republic were bought online and sent to the buyer via private courier service or the standard post. Some purchasers using the postal service have access to vacant commercial or residential properties and are using these addresses for delivery of the illegal drugs.

The majority of people ordering these drugs online seem to be doing so for personal use. However, organised crime gangs have now started taking advantage of the relative ease of obtaining the drugs, reselling them at a considerable profit. Now that the drugs have been made illegal, those purchasing them from the dealers are prepared for the product to be more expensive and are willing to pay extra for them. There was at least one seizure this year valued at more than €800,000.

In September, two young men, Michael Coleman aged 22 and Liam Coffey also 22 died in Kinsale, Cork, after taking a synthetic drug which contained both ecstasy and PMMA, a stimulant drug. The number of deaths related to synthetic drug use is expected to rise this year, according to the Health Research Board.

By the end of 2011, the first complete year since the ban on head shops and synthetic drugs, Revenue Customs Service had seized 101 packages containing these drugs which had been ordered online. Up until September 2012, that number had risen to 697 and is expected to exceed 1000 by year end – ten times the amount seized in 2011.

Customs and Gardaí have said that since the head shop closures in 2010, some drug gangs have recognised the continued demand for these drugs and the easy availability of them via the internet and are acting accordingly.