

**North Carolina Department
of the Secretary of State**

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

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**Elaine F. Marshall
Secretary of State**

THC-Laced Snacks Using Counterfeited Brands Seized Around the State
Weapons and Other Drugs Seized As Part of Operation

NEW HANOVER COUNTY – In the weeks leading up to Halloween, a Secretary of State-led law enforcement operation focused in Eastern North Carolina resulted in nearly \$170,000 worth of THC-infused snacks packaged using counterfeited brands being surrendered or seized from store shelves in North Carolina. In addition to the counterfeit branded edibles, weapons and other drugs were seized as part of the operation.

Trademark Law Enforcement Agents with the Secretary of State’s Office and the NC Anti-Counterfeiting Task Force worked with local authorities, including the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office, and other local law enforcement agencies on the coordinated enforcement effort.

Counterfeited brands ranged from Skittles and Fritos to AirHeads and Oreos.

“These THC-infused edibles are packaged using counterfeit snack brands that are particularly popular with children and teenagers,” said N.C. Secretary of State Elaine F. Marshall. “This growing trend is dangerous for our communities and it’s important to raise the overall awareness of this issue with parents and all residents around North Carolina.”

“We’re not going to stand by while we have these businesses selling illegal drugs and merchandise in our community,” said New Hanover County Sheriff Ed McMahon. “More importantly, we’re not going to allow these drugs to get out into our community where they could harm our children.”

While the packaging on the THC edibles includes markings indicating the snacks include THC, Secretary Marshall notes that these markings are deceptive and can easily be overlooked. The packaging is meant to look like regular food, candy, chips, and other sweets. Many times the labels feature a cartoon character or other images attractive to children. THC is the compound that gives marijuana its narcotic effect.

“Halloween is a time when our children are consuming more candy and sweets, so it’s particularly important if parents have THC-infused products in their homes to lock them away like other medications or cleaning products,” added Marshall.

According to America’s Poison Centers, formerly known as the American Association of Poison Control Centers, reports of cannabis edible poisonings in children 12 and under have increased nearly 700% since 2018. In 2022, there were 6,379 reports to poison control centers compared to 816 in 2018.

As a result of the operation, a number of weapons and other illegal drugs were seized. One individual was arrested on felony drug charges.

“Counterfeiting is not a victimless crime,” added Marshall. “As was the case here, there is oftentimes other dangerous activity associated with counterfeiting, whether it’s guns and illegal drugs here, or in other cases around the country it has been associated with organized crime, human trafficking, or terrorism.”

The counterfeited snacks were seized from a variety of vape and tobacco shops, with a majority located near high schools or colleges. Counterfeit items with a total estimated retail value of \$170,000 were seized as a result of 8 search warrants and 24 consent searches. Charges were filed in New Hanover County for Criminal Use of a Counterfeit Trademark, and Allowing Criminal Activity on Premises Holding an ABC Permit (by NC ALE), and in Edenton for Managing a Business Where Devices are Dispensed or Sold Without a Permit for counterfeit fashion contact lenses. Secretary of State Agents worked with authorities including Sheriff Offices in Craven County, Duplin County, Durham County, Lenoir County, and New Hanover County, as well as Police Departments in Bridgeton, Edenton, Kinston, Scotland Neck, Tarboro, Wallace, Williamston and N.C. Central University. Other partners included the N.C. Alcohol and Law Enforcement Division, the Lenoir ABC Board Law Enforcement Division, the N.C. Department of Revenue Drug Tax Unit, the Consumer Brands Association, Vaudra International, and Homeland Security.

“Our enforcement partners are a force multiplier that enables the Anti-Counterfeiting Task Force to conduct an operation of this size and scope in order to protect the health and safety of our people and our communities across the state,” said Marshall. “Their cooperation and dedication is very much appreciated.”

The North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State has the statutory duty to enforce laws that protect the holders of state and federally registered trademarks. Suspected counterfeit goods can be reported to the Secretary of State’s Office at anticounterfeit@sosnc.gov.

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