

Ohio police officer accidentally overdoses after traffic stop

By Katie Mettler May 16 at 3:05 AM

Last summer, the Drug Enforcement Administration warned law enforcement across the country that fentanyl, the dangerously potent and often deadly synthetic opioid, could not only kill drug users but officers exposed to small amounts.

So like many cautious departments, police in East Liverpool, Ohio, began arming themselves with masks and gloves when processing drug-related crime scenes.

And that's what Officer Chris Green did late Friday night when he responded to a traffic stop and found the driver and his car covered in a white powder, he told Morning Journal. But about an hour later, back at the police station, a colleague told Green he had something on his shirt. Green, without thinking, brushed it off with his bare hand. Within minutes, he fell to the floor.

"I started talking weird. I slowly felt my body shutting down. I could hear them talking, but I couldn't respond," Green told Morning Journal. ***"I was in total shock. 'No way I'm overdosing,' I thought."***

Paramedics were already on scene tending to Justin Buckle, 25, the driver of the car, and diverted their attention to Green. They gave him one dose of Narcan, an FDA-approved nasal spray version of a lifesaving medication called naloxone that can reverse the lethal effects of an opioid overdose.

Green was transferred to East Liverpool City Hospital and given three additional doses of Narcan, East Liverpool Police Capt. Patrick Wright told TV station WKBN.

"If he would have been alone, he would have been dead," Police Chief John Lane told Morning Journal. ***"That's how dangerous this stuff is."***

The accidental overdose was a grave reminder for East Liverpool and law enforcement that even the slightest exposure to drugs like fentanyl can be life-threatening.

"Think about this," Lane told ***Inside Edition***. ***"Nobody sees that on his shirt. He leaves and goes home, takes off that shirt, throws it in the wash. His mom, his wife, his girlfriend goes in the laundry, touches the shirt — boom. They drop. He goes home to his kid. 'Daddy! Daddy!' They hug him — Boom. They drop. His dog sniffs his shirt, it kills his dog. This could never end."***

Green had returned to work by Monday but was having headaches and chest pains, Lane told NBC News. ***"He's lying on the couch,"*** Lane said. ***"He's still miserable."***

The incident rattled local officials enough that it became a topic of conversation at the city council meeting Monday night in East Liverpool, where Service-Safety Director Brian Allen called for legislation that would prevent anyone from entering a home where drugs like fentanyl or its more potent cousin, the elephant tranquilizer carfentanil, have been found, reported Morning Journal.

And in a Facebook post Monday, the city of East Liverpool called on state lawmakers to act.

"It's time our state government drafts legislation to protect our safety forces from these harmful drugs," the city wrote. ***"Those in possession not only pose a risk to themselves but everyone they come into contact with as well."***

Fentanyl and carfentanil have been blamed in part for exacerbating America's deadly opioid epidemic. Drug dealers, in an attempt to stretch their supply and deliver a stronger, longer high, are cutting heroin with the two substances. Because both are odorless and colorless, it's almost impossible for authorities to immediately tell on scene what kind of heroin cocktails overdosing users have injected.

Fentanyl is said to be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, and carfentanil is 10,000 times stronger than morphine.

"It only takes one granule [of carfentanil] to kill an adult," Lane told Morning Journal. ***"These people have no regard for anybody, not themselves, not the police, not their kids. Their priority is not about anything but that next high."***

Buckel and his passenger, 24-year-old Cortez Collins of Cleveland, were arrested Friday night after officers witnessed what they believed was a drug transaction. Officers boxed in the vehicle and found white powder scattered throughout the vehicle and on one of the suspects, police told WKBN.

The men said the substance was cocaine, but a field test came back negative and the men allegedly admitted it was fentanyl, reported **Inside Edition**. The white substance will be tested further in a lab.

Buckel and Collins were charged with tampering with evidence. Police told Morning Journal that additional felony assault charges are expected to be filed in the case.

East Liverpool made headlines in September 2016 when the city decided to share harrowing photos of a man and woman overdosing in their car with a toddler watching in the back seat.

"It is time that the non drug using public sees what we are now dealing with on a daily basis," the city wrote in an accompanying Facebook post. ***"We feel we need to be a voice for the children caught up in this horrible mess."***