

Oregon Sues GNC Over Illegal Supplement Sales

By ACSH Staff — October 26, 2015



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We've written repeatedly about the problems with dietary supplements [ranging from ineffective to frankly dangerous ingredients](#) [3]. Now we find that Oregon is taking notice and is [suing](#) [4] General Nutrition Centers (GNC) for selling supplements which contain ingredients that haven't been approved for sale in the United States.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum has accused GNC of selling products it obtained from other vendors that it knew, or should have known, contained illegal compounds. In particular, the suit singles out two illegal ingredients picamilon and BMPEA.

Picamilon is a synthetic drug first produced in the former Soviet Union. It is a combination of the neurotransmitter GABA and the B vitamin niacin, and is touted to relieve anxiety. BMPEA (Î²-Methylphenethylamine) is chemically related to amphetamine. Although it is an old compound first synthesized in the 1930s it has not been tested for safety or efficacy in humans. It might be useful for reducing blood pressure.

If you follow the ongoing problems with many supplements, it should not be surprising that neither ingredient is listed on the products' labels. Thus, a person who is already taking drugs to reduce blood pressure might be in trouble if he or she added a BMPEA-containing supplement to their dietary regimen.

GNC is one of the largest purveyors of dietary supplements in the U.S., with over 6,000 outlets currently in operation. It sells vitamins, sports nutrition products, weight-loss products and a wide range of others.

If Oregon prevails in its suit against this company, it will be interesting to see how, and if, the supplement industry as a whole is affected. According to the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) supplement manufacturers are supposed to have data demonstrating that their products are safe, but if they claim not to know what's in their products, it's hard to see how that requirement can be met.

"I'm delighted to see that Oregon is taking this step to rein in at least part of the out-of-control dietary supplement industry," said Dr. Ruth Kava, senior nutrition fellow with the American Council on Science and Health. "It's really appalling that a company would sell such illegal substances, or be allowed to claim that they were unaware of their presence in their products. It will be fascinating to see how this lawsuit progresses."

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