



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### UTAH'S "CAT'S CLAW" OVERDOSES EXPOSE A FAILURE TO ENFORCE EXISTING LAW — AND THE FALSE LABELING OF THESE PRODUCTS AS KRATOM

**American Kratom Association condemns the mischaracterization of chemically manipulated opioid products falsely linking them to natural leaf kratom and Senator Mike McKell's rejection of meaningful enforcement tools**

WASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 31, 2026 — The American Kratom Association (AKA) today responded to a warning issued by the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) and the Utah Poison Control Center concerning dangerously mislabeled "Cat's Claw" tablets associated with a recent death and several severe health incidents in Utah — tablets that both agencies falsely characterized as "kratom products."

These specific "Cat's Claw" products have been illegal since the passage of Utah's Kratom Consumer Protection Act in 2019, and recommendations to significantly enhance enforcement tools and enforcement funding were rejected by Senator McKell in his anti-kratom legislation recently enacted in 2026.

The AKA strongly supports the immediate removal of these products from the market and aggressive action against every manufacturer, distributor, and retailer responsible for selling them in Utah.

The "Buzzers" Cat's Claw tablets identified by Utah officials reportedly contained mitragynine pseudoindoxyl and MGM-15 — chemically manipulated, opioid-acting compounds — concealed behind a deliberately misleading label. These are not traditional kratom leaf products. They were not marketed honestly as kratom. They are illicit opioid products masquerading as an unrelated botanical supplement. Importantly, they cannot honestly be called kratom products, as UDAF has done.

"The Utah agencies' own findings demonstrate that these products are chemically manipulated opioids, deceptively labeled as Cat's Claw and sold in defiance of Utah law," said Mac Haddow, Senior Fellow on Public Policy with the American Kratom Association. "Calling them 'kratom products' rewards the very deception used by their sellers and wrongly shifts the blame from criminals trafficking in dangerous synthetic drugs to natural kratom leaf products and the responsible consumers who use those safely formulated and properly labeled products."

That failure is made more troubling by what occurred during Utah's 2026 legislative session.

The AKA strongly recommended giving UDAF: (1) increased enforcement funding through an excise tax on kratom products; and (2) meaningful enforcement authority, including administrative fines of up to \$20,000 for each illegal product offered for sale in Utah by a manufacturer, distributor, or retailer. Those penalties were intended to make trafficking in dangerous, mislabeled products economically intolerable and to give regulators the leverage needed to remove bad actors from the market.

Senator Mike McKell rejected those recommendations. The legislation he sponsored ultimately limited the administrative fine for selling without the required registration to no more than \$5,000 and appropriated no money to support enforcement. Senator McKell also adamantly refused to engage in any substantive discussions with the AKA about the enhanced enforcement tools and funding needed to protect Utah consumers.

“Senator McKell was warned that Utah needed stronger enforcement — not political attacks on responsible kratom consumers,” Haddow said. “He rejected an excise tax to fund increased enforcement and administrative penalties of up to \$20,000 per illegal product. Utah consumers are now seeing the consequences of that failed policy.”

“The illegal marketplace disappears when regulators have the authority, personnel, funding, and penalties necessary to identify illegal products, seize them, and impose consequences severe enough to deter everyone in the distribution chain,” Haddow added.

Government warnings should identify the substances involved and accurately distinguish them from natural kratom. Consumers who were harmed or who may have died after consuming these deceptively labeled tablets did not knowingly purchase natural kratom leaf products. They purchased products labeled as Cat’s Claw that allegedly concealed potent, illegal opioid compounds. Characterizing those incidents as caused by “kratom products” is scientifically misleading, unfair to consumers, and dangerously distracting from the real enforcement problem.

“Utah does not need more political scapegoating of kratom,” Haddow concluded. “It needs honest science, accurate public warnings, properly funded enforcement, and lawmakers willing to hold criminals accountable. Senator McKell’s approach failed every one of those tests.”

Consumers should not purchase or consume “Buzzers” Cat’s Claw tablets. Anyone who possesses the product should follow official safe-disposal guidance. A person who cannot be awakened or is not breathing requires immediate emergency assistance; call 911 and administer naloxone if available.

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## **About the American Kratom Association**

*The American Kratom Association is a consumer-based, nonprofit organization focused on protecting access to appropriately manufactured and accurately labeled natural kratom products while supporting strong measures to remove adulterated, synthetic, dangerously concentrated, or deceptively marketed products from the marketplace.*

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