HADDSEC

The Growing Plague of Drugs in Illinois Prisons



Introduction

AFSCME Council 31 represents some 10,000 employees who perform a variety of roles within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), including security, food service, administration, medical and rehabilitation. Union members are frontline workers, responding to dangerous situations within correctional facilities, performing first aid and other interventions when needed, and conducting searches of potentially dangerous or hazardous materials or contraband, among other vital responsibilities.

Over the past two years, these frontline workers have been confronted with an everincreasing and dangerous problem in their workplace: the widespread proliferation and usage of illegal and illicit drugs within the general population of incarcerated individuals. This drug use – ranging from fentanyl and ketamine to a massive influx of synthetic drugs, including the widespread and pervasive smoking of wasp/roach spray and synthetic marijuana – has led to deaths and serious health emergencies.

The explosion in illegal drug use has also put IDOC employees directly in harm's way, both due to increasing drug-related outbreaks of offender violence and to exposure to potentially hazardous substances.

While drug use is soaring across the entire system, the Illinois Department of Corrections lacks a coherent and consistent strategy to combat the problem. Moreover, there is no clear and reliable data available for public review regarding the proliferation of drugs in the system.

In fact, the department appears to be trying to prevent the disclosure of this information. While each facility maintains a count of illegal drug incidents per month in Operation & Management Reports (OMRs), these incidents are not included in the state's year-end OMRs, making it difficult to quantify and track patterns relating to drugs across the system. AFSCME Council 31's FOIA request for monthly OMRs from each facility from January 2022-May 2024 was denied, and AFSCME was only sent a link to the year-end OMRs listed on the IDOC website, which do not include the drug offense data included in the monthly reports.

Due to the department's failure to provide such data, this report instead relies on regular reports from local union officers at each facility, as well as extensive first-hand accounts from interviews with employees on the frontlines, with relevant data supporting these accounts wherever available.

A Growing Problem

In interviews with employees across the Illinois prison system, at every level of security, staff have reported that drug use has exploded over the past two years, to the point that smelling burning smoke is a daily occurrence for many corrections employees.

"It's getting worse over the last two years. It's gone through the roof. Five years ago, you smell something burning, you'd be grabbing a fire extinguisher. Now you smell something, you know offenders are smoking something." – Pontiac Correctional Center

"It's been getting worse over the past couple years, so much of it, it's overwhelming." – Sheridan Correctional Center

"East Moline is a minimum [security prison]. In the last year we had a transfer [of incarcerated people from another facility] come in. After that transfer we started finding drugs, papers in shakedowns... Within the past year, we've started putting Narcan in every housing unit." – East Moline Correctional Center

"It's way worse, every month it goes on, it gets worse ... over the last two years it's increased a thousand-fold and I'm not exaggerating. I started in 2008, and if you found one thing [back then], it would be huge. Every third cell now, if [the offender] hasn't flushed it, I'll find drugs. In wings, they have a haze and smoke smell." – Lawrence Correctional Center

"It's increasing a lot more over the last year, two years. There's not a day that goes by that you don't step on a wing and you don't smell burning paper coming from somewhere. Some days it's a very faint smell and some days it's overpowering.... I've worked at Danville for 12 years. This is something brand new. When I first started, you never heard of any type of drug being at that facility. I can remember maybe somebody had a cigarette that they stole, little stuff like that. Never this. You never had staff members being exposed and going to the hospital." – Danville Correctional Center

"Throughout the last couple years there have been more issues with drug related incidents than I can count at WICC." – Western Illinois Correctional Center

"It is a daily occurrence that this house reeks of smoke. It gets so bad that it reaches into the foyer, so there are days where there is literally no escape from the smell... [staff] wonder what kind of long-term effects they are going to face in the future." – Western Illinois Correctional Center Employee "The fumes in the cell house make you dizzy, also you get a headache instantly. We have been working in this environment at Pinckneyville for the last two years or more." – Pinckneyville Correctional Center

The limited data made available to AFSCME local unions requesting information on drug use in IDOC facilities supports these accounts:

- At Dixon Correctional Center, over six months preceding May 10, 2024, 13 incarcerated individuals were treated internally or externally for drugs/intoxication, with Narcan used nine times on incarcerated individuals and once on an outside contractor. While four incarcerated individuals have tragically died following suspected drug use, causes of death have not yet been officially released.
- From January 2022 through August 2024, there were 1,276 drug-related incidents at Dixon Correctional Center.
- At Graham Correctional Center, 46 incarcerated individuals tested positive for drugs of various kinds in April 2024 alone.
- At Western Illinois Correctional Center, there were 132 guilty findings of drugs and drug paraphernalia from June 2023 through December 2023.
- In its February 2024 monthly OMR, Lawrence Correctional Center listed four drug offenses at the facility, with two offenses listed for homemade intoxicants and two listed for synthetic drugs.
- In its April 2024 monthly OMR, Jacksonville Correctional Center listed five drug offenses at the facility, with each offense listed for synthetic drugs.
- From May 1, 2022 through February 28, 2024, Vienna Correctional Center had 96 incident hearings for alleged drug and drug paraphernalia offenses.
- From November 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024, Hill Correctional Center had 40 drugrelated incidents, with two of those incidents involving an assault on a staff member and one involving a medical emergency for an incarcerated individual.
- From January 2022 to April 30, 2024, there were 172 drug-related incidents at Stateville Correctional Center.
- From January 2022 to April 30, 2024, there were 199 drug-related incidents at Lawrence Correctional Center.

Additionally, a grievance submitted by Local 3585 from Illinois River Correctional Center attests that from 2014 through 2020, the facility saw approximately 60 drugrelated incident tickets written per year, with a jump to approximately 90 in 2021, 144 in 2022, 206 in 2023, and 80 in the first quarter of 2024.

Wasp Spray and Synthetic Drug Epidemic

Employees at every security level within the state prison system have reported a widespread explosion in the use of synthetic drugs, including K2/synthetic marijuana, as well as the smoking of paper covered in wasp/roach spray such as Raid and Off.

These wasp sprays contain pyrethroids, synthetic compounds used as insecticides in a variety of products. Studies into the adverse health effects of smoking wasp spray or ingesting pyrethroids are limited, though SC Johnson, the manufacturer of Raid, notes in its <u>Material Data Safety Sheet</u> that inhalation may cause adverse effects on the central nervous system. Additionally, the CDC <u>notes</u> that pyrethroids "interfere with the normal way that the nerves and brain function. Exposure to very high levels of these compounds for a short period in air, food, or water may cause dizziness, headache, nausea, muscle twitching, reduced energy, changes in awareness, convulsions and loss of consciousness. Changes in mental state may last several days after exposure to high levels of pyrethroids has ended."

While IDOC is able to test for K2/synthetic marijuana, there is not currently a test available for wasp spray, making it difficult to quantify the extent of its abuse across the system. However, based on interviews with employees at multiple facilities, it is clear that the problem is pervasive:

"It's hard to detect, but they can spray it on a piece of paper that's invisible to the eye, cut the paper into smaller pieces and sell them...It's so bad that we can't catch it, people will be out of it, put into healthcare, and they're still doing it." – Sheridan Correctional Center

"We don't test it until after they're caught smoking it or they're acting funny. When it's in the ink you wouldn't even know what to look for, it just looks like a normal typed letter." – Graham Correctional Center

"It is in a paper form, in little squares. They roll the squares in other materials, and then smoke them. It is a mixture of K2, other over the counter sprays." – Pinckneyville Correctional Center

"A couple shakedowns had occurred where they had found paper that looks suspicious, but the crime lab only tests for certain substances. So K2 or roach spray comes back negative." – East Moline Correctional Center

In March and April 2024, correctional officers at Stateville Correctional Center also reported multiple incidents of suspected K2/synthetic drug usage:

• On March 2, in Unit E, a correctional officer was conducting a routine round when they noticed an offender smoking in his cell. Other correctional officers were called

and the cell was searched, with two square pieces of paper 1/3 of an inch in height were found. The papers tested positive for synthetic cannabinoids.

- On March 8, 2024, while conducting a routine round in Edward House Gallery 7, a correctional officer noticed an incarcerated individual smoking what looked like a cigarette in their cell. The rolled paper, which was burnt at one end, was taken for testing, and inside, the investigating officer found four smaller pieces of paper. These pieces of paper tested positive for synthetic cannabinoids.
- On April 2, 2024, in Unit E, during routine security rounds, a correctional officer observed an unresponsive individual in a cell, with a burnt piece of paper still lit on his chest. Additional correctional officers arrived to the cell and helped the individual into a wheelchair before moving him to a health care unit for further observation. A piece of the paper initially tested positive for synthetic cannabinoids.

Multiple IDOC employees have reported the growing industry within the prison system involving the purchase of paper covered in wasp spray, and the reselling of small squares of this paper to other incarcerated individuals. To purchase this paper, incarcerated individuals can have someone outside the prison send it to them, or they can simply visit the website bugsprayonpaper.com.

This website, which has a customer service chatbot, a listed phone number, and a listed business address, sells paper sprayed in wasp spray for \$2500. The website plainly describes its operation to get this paper into prisons: disguising it as legal mail. "In most US prisons, all mail is opened, read and/or inspected. The sole exception to this is legal mail. This is the reason why we send directly from the attorney's office," the website says. "It will arrive as legal mail and therefore will not be opened..." [See Appendix A]

The Mail Problem

That website is only one of the ways in which incarcerated individuals are accessing papers sprayed with synthetic drugs and wasp sprays. However, interviews and individual incident reports show that the mail, including legal mail, is the predominant method by which these drugs are acquired.

In one instance on May 7, 2024 at Menard Correctional Center, the investigations unit intercepted an envelope addressed to an incarcerated individual from an alleged attorney's office, which was verified as a legitimate business address in Iowa. The name on the return address on the envelope was not listed on the offender's visitor/volunteer list. This envelope contained three pieces of paper appearing saturated and covered in a waxy substance. Preliminary tests showed the paper to contain synthetic cannabinoids. On May 14, 2024 at Pontiac Correctional Center, correctional officers were reviewing an outgoing letter from an incarcerated individual, and saw that he was writing to an outside contact asking to send paper covered in wasp spray.

On March 4, 2024, at Stateville Correctional Center in Unit D, a correctional officer delivering legal mail to an incarcerated individual noticed that the contents of the mail appeared waxy and discolored and made the decision to withhold the mail for further testing. The mail tested positive for synthetic cannabinoids.

Other drugs are also coming through the mail room. At Pontiac Correctional Center on February 23, 2024, an Internal Affairs lieutenant intercepted a letter containing a razor blade and a powdery substance in the mail room. The substance was tested for the presence of narcotics and resulted in a positive test for fentanyl.

On March 19, 2024, a correctional officer in the Hill Correctional Center mail room noticed that two pieces of mail, both containing one greeting card addressed to two separate incarcerated individuals, appeared to be altered and infused with an oil substance. The greeting cards were tested and found positive for fentanyl.

On April 24, 2024, a correctional officer in the Internal Affairs Unit was searching through suspicious incoming mail and discovered a large envelope containing an obituary that appeared to be altered. The obituary was tested and tested positive for fentanyl.

On September 10, 2024, a correctional officer was passing legal mail in the R1 wing of Pinckneyville Correctional Center and became dizzy and disoriented. Following an evaluation by an RN, the correctional officer was sent to a local outside hospital due to elevated blood pressure, swollen hands, and elevated heart rate. The next day a correctional officer who assisted with the previous day's possible exposure incident was sitting in a chair in the R1 wing and began to have what appeared to be a seizure. The correctional officer was taken to the hospital.

Interviews with employees describe the problem of drug smuggling through regular mail and legal mail throughout the system:

"If the mail was taken care of, we wouldn't have a drug problem at all…the legal mail isn't even coming from lawyers." – Graham Correctional Center

"The sticky waxy stuff, they can put it in the legal mail and get it past you... The only way they ever get anybody is when they catch it in the mail." – Pontiac Correctional Center

"The mail room is the biggest culprit. Our biggest issue at Sheridan is K2 that's coming through the mail room." – Sheridan Correctional Center

A Dangerous Environment for Staff and Incarcerated Individuals

The proliferation of drug use within the prison system has led to an increasingly dangerous environment, both for staff and incarcerated individuals. Offenders under the apparent influence of drugs often need to be resuscitated with naloxone (brand name Narcan), with many facilities adding more Narcan in multiple locations. In many cases, incarcerated individuals in medical distress need to be transported to hospitals, with several deaths suspected to be caused by drug overdoses. For incarcerated individuals committed to rehabilitating from drug addiction, it has too often become extremely difficult to avoid drug usage in the surrounding environment, even in minimum security facilities.

On multiple occasions across the system, staff members have also needed to be checked by medical teams or sent to outside hospitals, in some cases for serious health emergencies because of exposure to drugs or smoke when encountering usage by offenders. Additionally, there have been incidents reported at multiple facilities across the system in which offenders, who are in an apparent state of drug intoxication or are attempting to hide drugs from corrections staff, have become violent and/or assaulted staff members.

In interviews, IDOC employees describe the problem and detail multiple incidents of dangerous health emergencies for staff and incarcerated individuals:

"On April the 19th, 2024, a Friday night, we had four staff that had to go to Hillsboro [Area] Hospital for exposure. On January 22, 2023, staff responded to what they thought was a fight, but it was a guy falling all over himself in the day room. When staff responded, they had to get sent out to three different hospitals [for drug exposure].

"I've seen a grievance from an incarcerated individual that said he's trying to get help to stay clean, but the drug problem in the prison is so bad that it's easier to access drugs in prison than outside."– Graham Correctional Center

"Throughout the last couple years, there have been more issues with drug-related incidents than I can count at WICC. There was [one correctional officer] exposed while performing a shakedown of a living quarter, who was transported to a local hospital via ambulance and was later released...Another [correctional officer] exposed while going through offender property was also transported by ambulance. Our intel officer was treated for an exposure in HCU that he received while going through offender mail and was sent home for the day. This is not what these officers signed up to do. The state should be able to provide them with a safe place to work, or at least be taking steps in the right direction to fix it as opposed to turning their shoulder to a major drug problem within IDOC." – Western Illinois Correctional Center

"My most recent incident was an offender who had overdosed in the R4 C wing who was basically getting carried to the front of the wing and collapsed right by the stairs. Responding staff and I ended up carrying him out of the house with a back board to meet the nurse for worries he might die. We were doing sternum rubs and shaking him to keep him awake because he was continuing to go in and out of consciousness and would stop breathing. Every time he would wake up, he would gasp for air, and he was Narcaned two or three times before starting to come out of it." – Western Illinois Correctional Center

"People will become belligerent, aggressive, not want to be cuffed. They're not feeling pain, so they can do whatever. So many people get sent to the outside hospital for substances alone...We have to have Narcan in every corner of the prison." – Pontiac Correctional Center

"The most recent incident would be in May 2024, an individual that had a suspected drug overdose. He was sent to health care for treatment, was sent back to his cell and was dead the next morning...It's a daily basis where we have a code 3, medical emergency, suspected intoxication."—Dixon Correctional Center

"We've had a few cases where the smoke has been so bad in the hall that some staff have had to go to the hospital or healthcare. When incarcerated individuals are high, sometimes they're combative and it's hard to control them." – Sheridan Correctional Center

"Most of our assaults [on staff] are where the offenders are either high on some kind of drug or drunk on alcohol. You can't reason with a high person. They don't listen, can't reason. Even in the day room, they're high and passing out." – Lawrence Correctional Center

"On March 6, 2024, we had two staff members that were exposed to an unknown substance... They had elevated heart rates and blood pressure. On March 1, 2024, we had a staff member who was exposed to an unknown substance. He got sent to the outside hospital, and when he got there, they had him in a stroke protocol. He ended up being off of work for a month." – Danville Correctional Center

"The amount of times and units that the medical Staff has administered Narcan in the last 6 months is staggering at best. It's almost like an everyday or at least weekly occurrence." Pinckneyville Correctional Center Other incidents detailing serious health emergencies and violence against staff during drug-related incidents have also been reported across the state prison system over the last two years:

- On March 17, 2023, at Dixon Correctional Center, in Housing Unit 28, a corrections officer was conducting a hall check and observed an incarcerated individual who appeared unresponsive in a cell. After calling a Code 3 (Medical Emergency) and getting the incarcerated individual to sit up on the floor, the offender, who had vomit on his face, hands shaking, and was mumbling to himself, suddenly sprang to his feet and began punching one of the responding staff, a lieutenant, in the head and shoulder, with closed fists. After the responding team was able to apply restraints, the offender again fell unresponsive, and a nurse administered two doses of Narcan. An ambulance was called and the incarcerated individual was transported to an outside hospital.
- On January 29, 2024, at Shawnee Correctional Center, staff responded to an incarcerated individual who was unresponsive. The cell house sergeant, after immediately starting CPR, began to cough, feel dizzy, and felt a sore throat. After stepping away from the individual, three resident nurses took over CPR, and began having the same symptoms. All four staff members were sent to area hospitals to receive treatment, with the individual evacuated by ambulance.
- On February 24, 2024, at Vienna Correctional Center in Housing Unit 2C, a correctional officer was conducting a wing check when they noticed three offenders in a cell and smelled smoke coming from the cell. After a few minutes, the correctional officer began feeling loopy, dizzy, and nauseous after inhaling the secondhand smoke. The correctional officer was then brought to the health care unit to be evaluated.
- On April 2, 2024, at Hill Correctional Center, a correctional lieutenant was helping deliver food trays to the R1D wing, when he opened the door of one of the cells, and two pieces of paper blew out of the cell. The cell's occupant began running towards the cell door aggressively. As the lieutenant attempted to shut the cell door so they could retrieve the papers, the offender forcefully pushed the door back open and the door hit the lieutenant in their shoulder and chest. The offender continued attempting to push back against the door even after receiving direct orders to stop. The lieutenant and another officer were able to secure handcuffs on the offender...The papers were tested, and tested positive for fentanyl.
- On May 17, 2024, at Menard Correctional Center, correctional officers responded to calls from incarcerated individuals about a medical emergency in one of the cells... Officers found the occupant of the cell facedown on the ground, unconscious and bleeding. A Code 3 (Medical Emergency) was called, and medical staff administered

two doses of Narcan to the individual. The individual regained consciousness, and after being taken to the health care unit for further examination, was transported to the local hospital.

• On August 28, 2024, Menard Correctional Center went into lockdown following a mass exposure event that caused 12 staff members to need to be transported to a hospital for evaluation. Staff members were provided personal protective equipment to prevent further exposures.

Recommendations

The drug crisis within the Illinois prison system is widespread and increasing. IDOC must do more—and do it immediately--to keep its staff and its incarcerated residents safe, stop the flow of drugs into facilities, and allow for a truly rehabilitative environment for incarcerated people committed to staying clean from drugs. IDOC must acknowledge the problem it faces and commit to transparency regarding drug use within the system. AFSCME Council 31 recommends the following:

• Full transparency and data centralization regarding drug-related incidents:

Local union leaders at multiple IDOC facilities reported difficulties in engaging with management about drug use at their prisons, with management failing to acknowledge the issue's pervasiveness or agree to make any changes to stem the tide of drug use across the system. Additionally, IDOC has made it burdensome to track and analyze data regarding drug-related incidents across its system, including these incidents in each facility's monthly OMRs but removing this data from the systemwide year-end OMRs.

IDOC must commit to working with its staff on this very serious problem within labor-management committees and providing monthly reports on its efforts to combat drug use within each facility. All data on drugrelated incidents should be readily available for review. Individual drugrelated incident reports should be made available upon request, with personal information redacted if necessary.

• Stronger measures to prevent drug smuggling through the mail:

While regular mail is inspected in the mail room, paper sprayed with bug spray/ other synthetics is difficult to detect. Other drugs in powder form can put mailroom staff at risk. As a result of the work of a statewide AFSCME/DOC task force, IDOC has begun the process of shifting to digitally scanning mail for reading on tablets made available to incarcerated individuals. However, it is expected to take many months to implement this system throughout all correctional facilities. Other measures are urgently needed in the interim:

- 1. All mail operations should promptly be moved outside the secure perimeter to minimize exposure risks.
- 2. IDOC can shift to photocopying paper mail where possible.
- 3. IDOC must intercept and analyze all mail, including legal mail, sent from addresses/senders that have sent mail previously found to contain drugs, as well as any mail sent from addresses/senders listed on websites such as bugsprayonpaper.com.
- 4. When legal mail is suspected to contain drug materials, the mail should be authenticated by checking the sender against the offender's records and calling the attorney's office to verify its contents.
- 5. The department should pursue prosecution, including federal mail charges, against any identifiable senders of drugs.
- Clearly defined and diligently enforced consequences for drug use:

Correctional employees report that all too often management turns a blind eye to drug use by incarcerated individuals. Individuals know there will be no consequences for their actions and as a result, openly and flagrantly violate departmental policy in this regard.

IDOC must make clear that drug use by individuals in custody will have consequences. It must then rigorously and consistently enforce those standards.

• Prevent staff exposures and provide prompt and appropriate medical treatment for staff who are exposed to drugs in various forms:

There are still many unanswered questions about the types of substances that are being abused—and about their consequences for those who come into contact with them. Many employees are forced to work for hours on end in air where the smell of unknown substances is present. Others come into very close contact with the drugs when they attempt to intervene when offenders collapse, act out, or assault other offenders or staff.

Staff need in-depth training on steps to be taken when they believe drugs are being used on a unit. In any such situation, additional staff should

be brought to the unit to assist in identifying the source and halting the drug use. If any staff are injured due to aggression from the offenders involved or if staff are overcome by exposure to the drugs, it is critical that medical treatment is promptly provided and that staff are provided time to recover. Any such time off should be considered as due to a service-connected injury.

• Expand drug counseling programs and clean cell houses:

The exponential increase in drug use throughout the prison system is making it more difficult for those individuals who want to overcome drug addiction to do so. Combatting such addiction is critical to rehabilitation and potential return to the community.

IDOC must commit to supporting increased drug counseling programs, with additional measures towards treating offenders engaged in the use of synthetic drugs. In acknowledging the problem of drug use, IDOC must provide living space for incarcerated individuals fully committed to drug rehabilitation and allow these individuals the ability to reside in a clean environment free from drug use.

Conclusion

Testimony from IDOC employees and the limited data made available indicates that drug use within Illinois prisons has skyrocketed over the past two years, but IDOC management is reluctant to acknowledge the growing crisis within the state prison system or to take vigorous measures to address it. Instead, IDOC staff at facilities throughout the state are forced to work in environments where drugs are being used constantly, leading to dangerous exposure to smoke and assaults by offenders who are under the influence of drugs. IDOC must act now to stop drug use – including the rapidly increasing use of synthetic drugs and smoking of wasp spray – in its system and keep its employees and incarcerated residents safe.

Appendix A

Smoking Bug Spray On Paper easily in jail. Bug Spray On Paper, the best online shop where you can buy bug sprays like WASP and RAID on paper. On the street, this drug is commonly called KD. Bug spray on paper is a way cheaper alternative to k2 spice spray on paper.

Smoking bug spray on paper. Bug spray on paper? That seems like a paper which kills bugs. It could be true. Nevertheless in our case here at bugsprayonpaper.com, the paper is sprayed with bug sprays like RAID, WASP and clone roach spray. We also use roach motels to produce papers that will get you high to another level at a much cheaper price.

Smoking Roach Spray

Why sell bug spray on paper? Well with the growing methods used by law enforcement to tackle drug access in prisons, we have to come up with new and affective ways to make the long stay in jail seem shorter. This is also a cheaper alternative to k2 spice spray on paper.

The process of making bug spray on paper or wasp spray high is not just by spraying RAID, WASP or any other spray on paper and ship. We have two main points of priority:
Making sure the bug sprayed paper odorless: to achieve this, we use odor neutralizing technology. This consist of using engineered materials consisting of micro-sized particles that capture and physically bind odor-causing compounds or catalytically convert the odor molecules into non-odorous molecules. This is done in a vacuum space to make sure at the end, the only compounds left on the paper are the pyrethroids. These pyrethroids are what is responsible to get you high.
Getting the bug spray infused paper to you in jail without it being intercepted: In most US prisons, all mail is opened, read and or inspected. The sole exception to this is legal mail. This is the reason why we send directly from the attorney's office. It will arrive as legal mail and therefore will not be opened. Before shipping will collect every information needed.

After receiving the bug spray on paper, you can either smoke it or just ingest it. Smoking wasp spray on paper is called wasping. Called KD or Katie by some and roach spray by others, our bug spray on paper is guaranteed to make feel like you've never done before. Order now and have it delivered to you in jail. We offer overnight shipping.

The effects are indescribable. This shit will get you so high that you will want more every few hours. And its way cheaper than K2 spray.

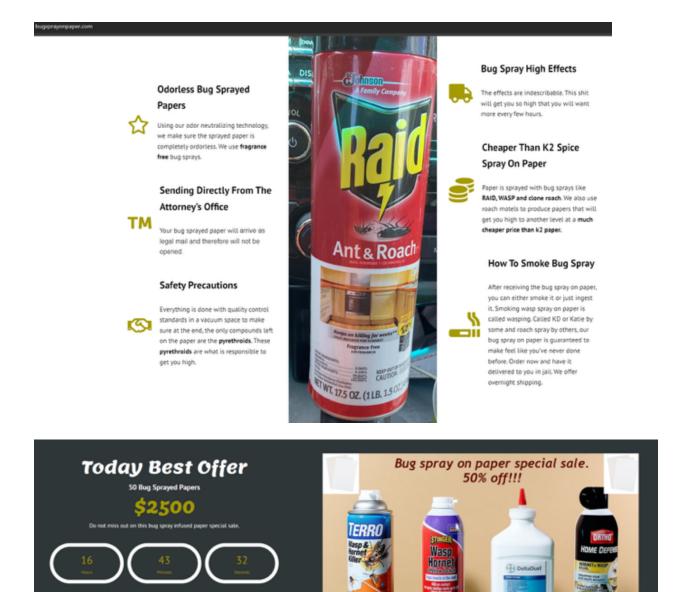








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