



Vantage Trial Consulting

Kratom Litigation: What Drives Juror Decisions

Part 1: The Power of Betrayal | Lessons from the Coyne Verdict

by [Dr. Juli Adelman](#) on February 18, 2025

Kratom litigation is on the rise. Whether you represent a widow whose husband died after ingesting kratom or a corporation sued for inadequate warnings and labeling, understanding how jurors assign fault and damages in these cases can prevent unwelcome surprises during deliberations. This article is the first in a three-part series and examines the first kratom case to result in a jury verdict [Sybil Coyne v. Wendianne Rook and Jeff Rook; Society Botanicals, LLC, et al.](#).

Kratom, a tropical tree native to Southeast Asia, has leaves that are crushed and consumed for their psychoactive effects. Its primary alkaloids, mitragynine and 7-hydroxymitragynine, bind to opioid receptors in the brain, producing effects similar to opioids: analgesia, euphoria, and sedation.

In July 2023, a jury awarded \$2.5 million to the plaintiff in the Coyne case. The fact pattern revealed the story of Patrick Coyne, a boat mechanic and father of three, who was found dead at home in his recliner after using kratom multiple times daily to manage chronic back pain. The judge and jury concluded that inadequate warnings, labeling, and instructions directly caused his death and that the defendant's actions were extreme enough to have violated consumer protection laws.

Large verdicts are not driven by sympathy; they are statements of accountability. Sybil Coyne received \$1.1 million in economic damages and \$1.4 million in non-economic damages- a staggering sum in Cowlitz County, where the median income is \$36,000. The jury's message was clear: corporate negligence with life-or-death consequences will not be tolerated. The special verdict form confirmed the defendant's failure to ensure product safety, directly linking these oversights to Patrick's death.

What fueled this outcome? The complaint revealed that defendant Wendi Rook promoted kratom through a free eBook titled "KRATOM: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS AND BENEFITS OF THIS AMAZING PLANT" which downplayed risks. For example, she made statements such as:

On overdose risk: "If the quantity consumed is too much for the body to handle the kratom will let you know by causing nausea or vomiting. You may have heard some highly biased stories in the media of how kratom caused someone's untimely death however, what the media doesn't reveal in these stories is the list of other potentially lethal substances found in the dead person, blood. Keep

in mind that there is no scientifically confirmed recorded fact of kratom ever causing a single death, so no need to be nervous about trying it.”

The court reinforced this narrative. In a pretrial summary judgment, the judge ruled the product's warnings and instructions inadequate. Jurors later found Society Botanicals guilty of deceptive practices under the Consumer Protection Act—a predictable outcome given the eBook's misleading claims. Jurors do not like deceit. Written materials like Rook's eBook become focal points in deliberations, offering tangible proof of dishonesty. While testimony and scientific evidence can overwhelm jurors, written lies are indelible. They erode defendant credibility and shape verdicts.

Betrayal also resonates deeply. Here, the defendant's denial of kratom's risks betrayed the community's trust. Jurors—many familiar with betrayal in their own lives—saw parallels in the company's disregard for safety. The family, customers, and community were betrayed. Not all kratom cases will involve betrayal, but anticipating how jurors interpret and evaluate the facts in your case prior to trial is critical to mitigating damages or recovering damages for your client.

[READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE](#)



Vantage Trial Consulting
Los Angeles, California | Tel: 1-866-478-7226 |
info@vantagetrialconsulting.com