

# Bath salts problem in Richland County continues to grow

Hallucinations, paranoia among users pose challenges for police

A shot had been fired with an infant girl and an 18-month-old boy in the house.

City police Sgt. Bret Snavelly wasn't sure how to instruct his third-shift officers to handle the call. They had to get to the kids but didn't know what was happening.

In the recent incident in the 300 block of Cedar Street, three adults were arrested on charges of endangering children and abusing harmful intoxicants.



Mansfield city police crime lab Director Tony Tambasco examines a package of Posh Aromatherapy in February. The substance, marketed as a bath salt, contains a drug known to cause hallucinations and paranoia. / Jason J. Molyet/News Journal.

The suspects were under the influence of methylenedioxypropylvalerone, MDPV, which turned up locally in January in a product called Posh Aromatherapy that is being marketed as a bath salt. Since then, police have handled about two dozen calls.

"We have seen an increase in the abuse of bath salts. It's a great concern," METRICH Commander Lt. Ken Coontz said. "The two main side effects that occur are hallucinations and paranoia. Those make for very difficult issues for the responding patrol officers."

Snavelly found out in the wee hours of April 16.

"They were thinking that people were after them," he said of the Cedar Street incident. "They were holing up in the house and had a rifle. They had these delusions that people were trying to get in their house."

Snavely used a public address system to convince the people to come outside.

"Had they not come out the front door, step two could have been more complicated," he said.

An anonymous caller told police the suspects were paranoid and had fired a gunshot inside the residence, but they claimed a rifle had fallen off a kitchen table and accidentally discharged.

Coontz was skeptical.

"You're in that state of paranoia, it's no wonder you mishandle a deadly weapon," he said.

So-called bath salts look like ground-up heroin or cocaine and come in small, clear plastic containers. People snort or smoke them.

Bath salts come with a label saying they are not for consumption. MDPV is legal in Ohio.

In January, Florida banned MDPV after a rash of violent incidents, including one in which a woman tried to behead her 71-year-old mother with a machete. Several other states have banned or are considering banning MDPV, which is sold under other names such as Blue Silk, TranQuility and White Lightning. The United Kingdom banned the substance last spring.

"The problem is we don't have any research with this drug as we do with other drugs," police Chief Dino Sgambellone said. "We know what cocaine and those other drugs do."

Snavely said police have arrested some people under the influence of bath salts and taken others to the hospital.

As the head of a 10-county regional drug task force, Coontz is struggling to deal with the sale of bath salts.

"The thing that bothers me that most is these retail owners are displaying these items out on a shelf irresponsibly," Coontz said. "I think it's disgusting."

"There's no legitimate reason to sell 500 milligrams of bath salts for \$20 to \$80. That's less than a teaspoon."

Coontz said he has talked to a couple of store owners.

"They're very vague. They pretend like they don't know the purpose of it," he said. "That's just a guise for making these products seem legitimate."

Police recently dealt with the first related breaking and entering. The thief took bath salts but nothing else from a south side convenience store.

Snively never thought he'd have to deal with such a product.

"I'm a bar of soap kind of guy. I don't even know what bath salts are used for legitimately," Snively said.

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