

# Parents pack drug forum in Lexington

## Bath salts latest danger in community

A new threat to the community dominated the question-and-answer session at a community drug forum Thursday.

Several parents asked a panel at Lexington High School about bath salts, which cause hallucinations and paranoia. They first appeared in Mansfield a few months ago in a product called Posh Aromatherapy. Bath salts are legal in Ohio and are sold at many convenience stores.

"In Mansfield, it's almost become an epidemic," METRICH Commander Lt. Ken Coontz said. "They're terrible. They serve no purpose."

Coontz called store owners who sell bath salts "irresponsible" and encouraged residents to confront them about why they sell the product.

"They will not have a legitimate answer," he said.

A spokeswoman for MedCentral/Mansfield Hospital said staff treated eight people who were under the influence of bath salts on Monday alone.

"They (people under the influence of bath salts) are completely psychotic," Dr. Anthony Midkiff said. "It is really scary."

One parent asked about testing for bath salts, but Mansfield police crime lab Director Tony Tambasco said there is no screen for them.

More than 200 people who filed into the high school auditorium watched videos of Stephanie McKay and Michael Willis.



METRICH Commander Lt. Ken Coontz, addresses the audience during the "What Parents Need to Know, a Community Forum on Substance Abuse Education and Prevention".

McKay, 24, died of an overdose in April 2010.

Willis, 23, died in March. His death is under investigation.

Betsy Willis, Michael's mother, talked about identifying his body at the morgue.

"If I can save one parent from feeling what I feel, it will help me heal," she said.

Willis said her son graduated from Lexington in 2006 and received a degree last year from Kent State University, where he had a double major. She said her son's death had a purpose. The audience gave her a standing ovation.

Charleen McKay wrote a piece on her daughter, whose drug use didn't start until late in high school but progressed rapidly.

"Smoking pot became almost an obsession," she wrote. "What many of her friends could experiment with and leave behind, she could not."

Coontz said the two main drugs affecting the area are heroin and pharmaceuticals.

"Your problem isn't so much the drug trafficking, it's the abuser," he said. "They need help."

Thursday's forum was geared toward parents. Cindy Wallis, of Individual and Family Services, urged the audience to pay attention to what children are doing.

"One bad decision and they're on full life support," she said. "One bad choice, and it could be your life."

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