

Richland County struggling to get ahead of 'bath salts' problem

Richland County is leading the state, but not in a way local authorities would like.

"We're one of the first communities in Ohio to deal with bath salts," said Vivian Winters, adult program director at The Center for Individual and Family Services. "A lot of places have never even heard of them before."

Bath salts is a synthetic drug that creates a high that can last several hours or up to days. The long-term effects are still unknown.

At a news conference Thursday at The Center, Winters expressed a need for more education. She said the drug really began to be a local problem in December.

"There are still people who think bath salts are just bath salts. They're something you use in your bathtub," Winters told a crowd of about 100.

"But this drug is highly addictive and definitely not something you'd want in your tub."

The scariest part?

"You don't know what's in there. No batch of bath salts is the same," Winters said.

Some bath salts contain anti-Parkinson's medicine and anti-seizure medicine, and come in a variety of packaging, including small envelopes and lip gloss containers.

Winters said it is also rumored that a body spray, containing the drug, is being developed.

Why has it become so popular?

"Well, for a while, it was legal here. It was legal and cheap," Winters said. "There was no age limit, and it was easily accessible."

The drug, which can be snorted, injected or smoked, has now been banned in Mansfield, Ontario, Lexington and Shelby.

The Food and Drug Administration has not approved the drug. A label on the package also reads "Not for human consumption."

Bath salts have been known to cause severe weight loss, chest pains, increased blood pressure, hallucinations, delusions and seizures.

METRICH Detective Darren Remaley said so far there haven't been any related fatalities in Mansfield.

"But it's just a matter of time," he said.

"This needs to be a community effort," said Joe Trolan, Executive Director Richland County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board. "If you know a store that's selling or someone who's using, you need to report it."

Originally published in the News Journal on June 24, 2011.