

METRICH raids Mansfield store, seizes bath salts

The owner of the Mountain Drive-Thru said he's done with bath salts.

Through tears, the 27-year-old Mansfield man watched as METRICH detectives raided his store Thursday night.

"That's it," said Khalad Ayaad, who runs the 481 Springmill St. business with his two brothers. "I'm not going to sell bath salts anymore."

His brothers, Naser Sabino Abdalla Beniter, 43, and Ayyad Abdallan, 23, were taken to the Richland County Jail around 9:15 p.m., charged with the possession, use or sale of synthetic drugs.

"I'm 27. I've never been to jail before. I don't know how I'm going to feel in there," Ayaad said.

Ayaad locked up the store when police were through, and was charged along with his brothers. First-degree misdemeanor charges carry up to six months in jail and up to a \$1,000 fine.



METRICH Commander Ken Coontz checks to see if a found gun is loaded Thursday night during a raid at Mountain Drive-Thru.

METRICH Commander Ken Coontz said bath salts causes hallucinations and severe paranoia.

"This is an epidemic and we take it seriously," Coontz said as the team wrapped up around 10 p.m. "I think it's terrible that METRICH not only has to deal with the local drug dealers, but now small business owners as well."

Mansfield passed a ban on synthetic drugs June 7, making it a first-degree misdemeanor to use, possess or sell. Bath salts are a drug mixture of compounds synthetically created, containing MDPV, which has been recognized as a dangerous drug.

"This ban is what gives you the teeth to do something about it," Coontz said. "The state ban has not yet taken place, so these guys are lucky they're only catching a misdemeanor. But (Mansfield police) Chief Dino Sgambellone is very concerned and will be pursuing felony charges for others in the future."

METRICH, the multi-county drug task force, was joined by Mansfield police in the raid. In addition to bath salts, detectives reported finding hundreds of packages of synthetic marijuana, called Kush.

Synthetic drugs worth about \$12,000 were recovered, along with \$2,500 in cash and two 9-mm guns. Other drug paraphernalia was recovered, including small scales and pill crushers. Several cell phones were confiscated.

Detectives recovered hundreds of \$20 packages of DOWN2EARTH White Horse, a brand of bath salts, stored in various places behind the store counter, including a cut-up Snickers box.

Another employee, Dontrell Johnson, 18, who was working the drive-through when authorities arrived, received a summons and was released after officers reported finding a small bag of marijuana, a knife, with a three-inch blade, and cash stuffed in his doubled-up pair of black socks. The Mansfield man was charged

with possession of marijuana and possession of a dangerous ordnance. In Mansfield, a knife blade has to be 2 1/2 inches or less or it is considered a dangerous weapon.

Coontz said METRICH received its first bath salts report at the Mountain Drive-Thru last February. Since the ban was passed in June, the department has received at least 30 complaints through traffic stops, concerned citizens and family member tips.

METRICH received a search warrant Thursday through Mansfield Municipal Court Judge Jerry Ault. The raid began around 8 p.m., with officers quickly cutting off a line of customers.

Abdallan said he wasn't aware the city banned synthetic drugs.

"I don't speak English well," he said. "I just moved to Mansfield. I don't know nothing."

Ayaad said the brothers took over the store eight months ago.

"I used to work in a grocery store, but opened this because I wanted to make money on my own," he said. "We will open back up the store when we get out, but we won't be selling no more drugs."

Anyone with tips about bath salts sales is asked to contact METRICH at 419-52-CRIME.

"We want people to know we will aggressively pursue other stores selling these products, and we definitely encourage citizens to call in tips," Coontz said.

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