

# Mansfield bath salts ban has helped, but use increasing in outlying areas

Just two weeks remain before a ban against the sale or possession of "bath salts" goes into effect throughout Ohio.

Law enforcement officials say packets containing the white powdery substance are still being sold in stores just outside the boundaries of Mansfield -- which enacted its own ordinance prohibiting bath salts in June.

Since the local ban, fewer incidents involving bath salts have been reported here, but abuse has increased in smaller nearby cities, officials said.

In July, the Ohio General Assembly approved Ohio House Bill 64, outlawing the sale or possession of bath salts and of synthetic marijuana. The new law begins Oct. 17.

The packets marketed in sometimes psychedelic packaging as "bath salts" have no relation to the traditional salts people put into their baths. Instead, they are made up of synthetic stimulants, including methylenedioxypropylamphetamine (MDPV).

Jody Allton, director of psychiatric and social services for MedCentral/ Mansfield Hospital, said in her 29 years in the field, she has never seen a drug with such bizarre consequences.

Abusers have come into MedCentral's 31-bed psychiatric unit unable to keep their clothes on, or suffering from thick scabs all over their bodies "because they think they have bugs on them." One patient cut his leg to shreds with a knife while on bath salts, she said.

Bath salts have the effect of putting people out of touch with reality, Allton said.

At the height of the problem, at least eight people would be in the psychiatric unit because of bath salts on a given Monday morning.

"But that has really dropped off. I really commend the city (for its ordinance)," she said. "But just talk to the College of Wooster. They are starting to see a rash of them."

Bath salts abuse, which had seemed to be concentrated in the Mansfield area, is starting to hit to the north, south and west, METRICH Commander Lt. Ken Coontz agreed.

"It's definitely going through Ashland now," he added.

METRICH visited the shops inside city limits that were believed to be selling bath salts ahead of the local ban's effective date, warning owners the ordinance would go into effect.

Only one shop owner kept selling, law enforcement officials said.

"There are other stores just outside city limits that are still selling," Coontz said. "Step outside the city limits, it's not illegal (until Oct. 17)."

Shelby, Ontario, Crestline, Galion and Lexington all enacted bans on bath salts and synthetic marijuana-like substances within their boundaries around the same time Mansfield did.

Mansfield Crime Lab Supervisor Tony Tambasco encouraged area municipalities to adopt generic language that would allow the cities and villages to stay one step ahead of new synthetic variants.

Tambasco has amassed a collection of bath salts marketed under names ranging from Purple Haze to Orange Crush. Typically, the packets are labeled "not for human consumption," he said.

Store owners started selling bath salts because they can be lucrative, at \$14 to \$20 for half a gram, Tambasco said.

Specialists in his field believe the raw drug is shipped in from research labs outside the U.S., then mixed and packaged here.

"There are just no labs in the United States that we have found," Tambasco said. "We're convinced it's all from China."

During a drug awareness meeting for parents earlier this week, Tambasco said the Mansfield crime lab recently became aware variants of Purple Haze were being sold in smaller, much less expensive packets. So far, none of the smaller packets actually have tested positive for the usual bath salts ingredients.

"They are Dominican Republic tobacco," he said.

But those products could continue to circulate to unsuspecting buyers for awhile, he said.

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