



'Bath Salt' use high in Permian Basin

PRC: Region second only to Houston

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A representative with the Prevention Resource Center said the use of synthetic cathinones, or "bath salts," is high among the Permian Basin region, with the rate of reported use in the area coming in second only behind Houston.

Carrie Bronaugh, PRC coordinator for Region 9 which includes Ector and 29 other counties, said the average number of people who used "bath salts" in the region is about 25 people out of every 100,000. The rate is only second to Houston, which had a rate of about 69 people out of 100,000 people.

Bronaugh also said between 2010 and 2011, the number of people from the 553,000-person region, who called the Poison Control Center after ingesting "bath salts" was 474 — 380 men and 94 women. The drug can be ingested, snorted, or in some cases, injected.

"In the last two months, there have been 10 people who have walked in (the Outreach Screening Assessment and Referral program) with bath salts being their primary drug of use along with meth," Bronaugh said.

"I think with our area being so strong with the oil and everyone moving in, that has increased our calls," Bronaugh said.

"Bath salts," which used to be sold in adult stores, independently owned convenience stores, gas stations and head shops, became a national topic after the May 26 Miami, Fla., attack where law enforcement shot Rudy Eugene to death after he bit off large amounts of 65-year-old Ronald Poppo's face. Law enforcement officials in the area believe Eugene may have ingested "bath salts," however; the toxicology report in the case has not been concluded.

Tony Mason, the OSAR program director and a licensed chemical dependency counselor, said "there's definitely a rise" in the number of people who come in for treatment for "bath salt" use, and said he only started seeing use of the product about a year ago while working in San Angelo.

Those who do come in show no signs of use, but Mason said it's hard to tell what the long term effects are. While using "bath salts," Mason said users can experience psychotic episodes before coming off the high.

"It almost seems like this is a more prevalent way to see things," Mason said while describing a patient who described a three-way conversation with himself, God and the devil.

Attempts to locate "bath salts" in several locations across Ector County were unsuccessful. Medical Center Hospital Emergency Room Dr. Sudip Bose said the item could still be bought online because of loopholes in the legal system.

"Manufacturers get around it by changing one molecule ... and labeling it 'Not for human consumption,'" Bose said. "I would say to the public, because it will be difficult for the government and DEA to keep up, it's the public that has to keep up with it."

A man-made stimulant that offers effects similar to the African Khat plant, Bose said the emergency room has seen an increase in patients coming in after taking "bath salts," experiencing symptoms from paranoia, to agitation and dehydration.

Bose said the salts aren't targeted towards any one age group and has seen a variety of people come in, all experiencing different effects.

"I saw a patient who was punching through windows and had severe lacerations because he thought there was aliens outside," Bose said.

Ector County Sherriff Mark Donaldson said he knows a few instances where suspects have been believed to have taken "bath salts," but said there have not been any reports of people acting out and violently attacking others. Odessa police said they also weren't aware of any violent incidents related to "bath salts."

The "bath salts" in question differ than those actually intended for the bath tub. Bronaugh said the items come in a small tin can with bright colors and contain cathinones, which was listed as a Schedule I drug by the DEA. Being in possession of Schedule 1 drugs is a felony punishable by a time and jail time.

A report from the National Drug Intelligence Center states most people who use synthetic cathinones are "attracted to the drugs because they can evade most drug testing" and "most current routine drug testing screens do not detect the presence of synthetic cathinones."

Bose said the drug become more frequent because of its price.

"Imagine the worst possible combination of heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, PCP, LSD, and Ecstasy mixed into one drug," Bose said. "This is the top drug I would never want to touch."

Bronaugh said regular bath salts can still be purchased at stores and cautions people not to ingest those either.

“We haven’t heard of Bath and Body works selling in the unsafe sense,” Bronaugh said.

<http://www.oaoa.com/news/use-88655-resource-center.html>