

County bans synthetic marijuana as an imminent danger

By Dennis Pelham Daily Telegram Jun 14, 2012



Photo: Mike Dickie

In Leigh Jameson-Heise's office at the Community Action Agency small packages of "synthetic marijuana", sold as potpourri are pictured with a large package of fruit snacks on Wednesday. The packaging of the "synthetic marijuana" targets and appears to be designed to attract youth.

ADRIAN, Mich. — The sale of synthetic marijuana and bath salts was outlawed Wednesday in Lenawee County under an emergency health order. "This is a plague on our children," said county commissioner Cletus Smith, R-Madison Twp., before a unanimous vote enacting and order signed by county Health Officer Patricia Bourgeois. "I have not seen anything of this degree that has affected children as this has," said Smith, a retired sheriff's deputy who worked on narcotics enforcement.

Efforts to ban synthetic marijuana, known as K-2 or Spice, as well as drugs sold as bath salts, have gained traction recently after a number of violent crimes and deaths. The Michigan

Legislature passed a law banning the drugs that is to take effect July 1 if signed as expected by Gov. Rick Snyder.

“We need to take action today,” Lenawee County Prosecutor Burke Castleberry told commissioners. Once the order to prevent an imminent danger is voted on and signed, he said, it will be immediately distributed to retailers in the county and enforced. Any violation in the ban on sale and distribution of the drugs is a misdemeanor crime carrying a maximum six-month jail term and \$200 fine. “The purpose of the order is not to punish out citizens through enforcement of this order; we want to protect our citizens,” Castleberry said.

“We think this is an emergency,” said Leigh Jameson-Heise, coordinator of the Lenawee Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition. A survey taken in the county last fall found 9 percent of students in the seventh through 12th grades admitted they had tried synthetic marijuana, she said. Two percent admitted to using bath salts. “These are marketed to kids,” said Jameson-Heise. She showed commissioners packages of the synthetic marijuana with cartoon characters similar to children’s cereal boxes.

“The kids understand this is legal, so they don’t think they’re doing a bad thing,” she said.

The result has been children being brought in to hospital emergency rooms after becoming violent and combative, she said. Some are also being arrested for crimes committed while intoxicated by the substances, she said.

Commissioner Ralph Tillotson, R-Adrian Twp., described a letter he received from a man worried that his 12-year-old grandson will be able to return to buying synthetic marijuana at convenience stores in Adrian when he is released from the county’s juvenile facility. “Everyone here has gotten a letter or gotten an email or talk to someone on the street,” Tillotson said in urging for a vote for the county ban. “This is something that needs doing and needs doing now.”

“We want to get it off the shelves,” said Commissioner David Stimpson, R-Tecumseh. He opposed a criminal approach during a committee discussion last week that he said could label some innocent people as drug offenders. He said he is satisfied the order will be fairly applied and enforced. Violations investigated by police will be reported to the Lenawee County Health Department and forwarded to the prosecutor’s office for authorization of any criminal charges. “I will be personally looking at the complaints,” Castleberry said, agreeing that he and Stimpson were never far apart on the goal of stopping the sales.