

Synthetic drugs eyed

County may criminalize sale, use

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Following the lead of other counties around the state, the Monroe County Legislature is poised to make the sale or possession of synthetic drugs, such as bath salts or fake pot, a crime.

Under legislation introduced this week and expected to be adopted, anyone caught using, selling or sharing such

drugs could be charged with a misdemeanor and face a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

The law would give greater teeth to local law enforcement to combat the scourge of the drugs, which have been linked to bizarre behavior and dangerous side effects, including psychotic episodes, seizures and heart attacks, even when taken in small doses.

Federal and state actions are said to

have greatly reduced the ubiquity of the drugs, which until recently were readily available on smoke shop shelves.

In July, federal legislation was signed for the first time that banned families of synthetic compounds commonly found in the drugs. Manufacturers had been getting around laws written to specific chemicals by replacing the ingredients with legal alternatives.

A state Department of Health regulation barring the sale of synthetic drugs

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that took effect in August further reduced their availability on the street, health care professionals said.

They added, though, that while the state regulation effectively cleared the drugs from smoke shops, its punishment of a \$500 fine and up to 15 days in jail has not deterred small, underground deal-

ers.

"They're upping the ante, and that's good," Jennifer Faringer, the region's director of DePaul's National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, said of the county legislation.

County Legislator Stephen Tucciarello, R-Gates, who co-sponsored the legislation with Legislator Rick Antelli, R-Greece, said the measure is meant to go further than the Health Department regulation.

"The state, I don't think, has taken it up fully and I think they could have done a better job in banning and outlawing these substances," Tucciarello said.

The legislation defines synthetic drugs as any "tobacco, potpourri, herbs, incense, spice, aromatic, bath salts, synthetic marijuana, synthetic stimulant or any combination thereof" laced with a wide swath of chemicals and derivatives that may have a similar effect

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the region's director of DePaul's National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, which offers drug and gambling prevention services

when consumed.

The measure is expected to pass the Republican-led legislature, perhaps as

early as March, following the scheduling of a public hearing.

Other counties, including Onondaga, Cayuga, Oswego and Clinton, have passed laws criminalizing synthetic drugs.

Dr. Alexander Garrard, a clinical toxicologist at the Upstate New York Poison Center, which fields calls from 54 counties across the state, said synthetic drug emergencies were almost unheard of before 2011.

That year, the center

received 360 calls reporting exposures to bath salts and synthetic marijuana. Last year, that number shot up to 665, most of it in the first seven months of the year before the state and federal actions.

"We saw a dramatic drop in the number of calls," Garrard said. "It's to the point that we're basically down to single digits (each month)."

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