

Synthetic drugs becoming prevalent in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Epidemic is the word South Lake Tahoe police Officer Rebecca Inman used to describe bath salts and Spice.

These are not substances to be used in the bathtub or kitchen. Instead, they are manufactured drugs that are legal to possess or use in California and Nevada. On Jan. 1 they will be illegal to sell in California.



Inman gave a report to the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Nov. 15 about these drugs that she said are being widely used by students at South Tahoe High School.

Spice is a brand name for a synthetic cannabinoid. Cannabinoids have similar effects of THC, the main compound in marijuana.

With the makers of these drugs continuously changing the chemical components, it's hard for lawmakers to write laws fast enough to keep up with what's on the market. What makes it legal to sell is the packaging says "not for human consumption". They both go by several different names.

What Inman stressed is users and parents don't understand how addictive these drugs are and the damage they can do.

"They are consuming something where they don't know what the full experience will be," Inman said. The length of the high is unpredictable.

It's what is sprayed on to the "herbs" inside the Spice

package that is so addictive.

“We got a call the other day where a brother bit a hole in his brother’s ear. He was high on Spice,” Inman said.

Bath salts, though, are even worse, according to Inman. Cathinone chemicals attack the central nervous system in similar ways to methamphetamines and cocaine.

Inman said youths like to snort the salts. But it comes in capsules and pill form, too. Injection is another option.

Spice and bath salts can be found at gas stations, convenience stores, head shops and the Internet.

“We have documented cases of crimes in our city where the suspects have been under the influence of Spice. Our juvenile population has found it easier to buy and use Spice and bath salts than alcohol and marijuana,” Inman said in her PowerPoint.

Rich Barna, executive director for Tahoe Turning Point, said a test has been developed to see if someone is using Spice or bath salts. Cost is the problem – \$120 per test for Spice, \$30 for bath salts. (Tahoe Turning Point is a private, nonprofit agency that provides group care and residential treatment for boys ages 12-18.)

Barna said he’s made it a personal mission to get these drugs out of town. Barna said Germany has banned the import of the drugs, while the state of Georgia is considering doing the same.

“With bath salts it’s almost an instant physical deterioration. It’s worse than meth,” Barna said. “It will bruise and burn the veins it’s injected into.”

The council, with Claire Fortier at a TRPA meeting, agreed to have City Attorney Patrick Enright look at what the city could do to ban Spice and bath salts from being sold, possessed and

used in the city limits. A letter will be written to Gov. Jerry Brown asking him to make possession a state crime. The League of California Cities will also be asked to weigh in on the issue.