## Pa. lawmakers consider ban on synthetic drugs "Bath salts" have been linked to violent incidents and still can be legally purchased.

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HARRISBURG — Growing use of powerful synthetic drugs linked to violent episodes has alarmed law enforcement officials and medical professionals and prompted lawmakers in Pennsylvania and elsewhere to consider legislation to ban them.

Authorities say chemical compounds containing methylenedioxypyrovalerone (MDPV) and mephedrone and marketed as "bath salts" had already gained notoriety in Europe when they arrived in this country early last year. Snorted to mimic the effects of cocaine and methamphetamines, they can be purchased legally in most of the country, most often in drug paraphernalia stores and on the Internet, officials said.

White House Drug Czar Gil Kerlikowske last month said the compounds can cause hallucinations, extreme paranoia and delusions and called them "a serious threat to the health and well-being" anyone who uses them. Officials in Pennsylvania say they are cropping up in cases of bizarre and disturbing behavior in many areas.

For example, Easton police report getting frantic phone calls on Christmas Day from a man who said he believed his home was surrounded by armed intruders. He greeted officers armed with a sword and pointing at the chimneys of surrounding homes as his assailants before he was subdued by a stun gun, authorities alleged in court documents.

In central Pennsylvania late last month, state police said a man using the drugs told police he ran away from his vehicle because he thought it was melting and electricity was chasing him.

In western Pennsylvania, authorities say the drug was recovered from the vehicle of two Warren County men who were found dead Thursday in the Allegheny National Forest. Tests are being done to determine whether they had used the drug before they died of exposure.

And in West Pittston earlier this month a couple hallucinating from bath salts nearly cut their 5-year-old daughter with the knives they were using to stab "the 90 people living in the walls" of their apartment, police said.

The state House is planning a final vote April 4 on a bill that would ban the sale of "bath salts" and add other synthetic narcotics to the list of controlled substances. The measure started out in January as a ban on salvia divinorum, a hallucinogenic herb mixture, and has been amended to include bath salts, synthetic marijuana and a synthetic cocaine known as "blizzard."

If approved, the bill would go to the Senate, which has measures of its own.

Five states have already banned sales of MDPV, and New Jersey is among many others considering such a ban.