

Sam Houston state developing lab test for bath salts

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Sam Houston State University is developing a laboratory test to detect the use of bath salts, a new designer drug that was added to the list of illegal substances by the Drug Enforcement Administration in 2011.

Sam Houston State University received a federal grant from the National Institute of Justice to create a test for key components of [bath salts](#) in [biological samples](#) in crime labs.

Bath salts, also known as synthetic cathinones, were legally sold in convenience stores, head shops and on the Internet until being included on the list of [illegal substances](#) through an emergency order by the [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) in October 2011. These drugs, that are capable of producing powerful hallucinogenic and adrenergic effects, are routinely seized in drug cases around the Houston metropolitan area and throughout the nation.

"Bath salts are the new breed of designer amphetamines, and they pose a number of challenges for [law enforcement agencies](#) from a public safety and public health standpoint," said Sarah Kerrigan, Director of the Forensic Science Program at Sam Houston State University.

According to the [Drug Enforcement Administration](#), bath salts also have adverse effects including rapid [heart rates](#) which may lead to heart attacks and strokes, chest pains, nosebleeds, sweating, nausea, and vomiting. Those who abuse the substance also report agitation, insomnia, irritability, dizziness, depression, paranoia, delusions, suicidal thoughts,

seizures, and panic attacks.

According to a 2011 report from the National Drug Intelligence Center, drug users are attracted to bath salts because they can evade most drug tests and, as a result, it may not be detected in impaired driving cases or death investigations.

"Analytical limitations for state and local forensic toxicology laboratories impact criminal and death investigation casework, and these deficiencies can have serious criminal justice consequences," Kerrigan said.

While bath salts are easy to detect in seized samples, such as pills, powders and capsules, once they are ingested, they pose a number of challenges in the toxicology lab. The Department of Forensic Science will develop a procedure to detect at least eight of the most common components found in bath salts in biological evidence. These components include mephedrone, flephedrone, methylone, butylone, ethylone, methedrone, MDPV, and naphyrone.

Many toxicology labs use gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC/MS) to identify drugs in biological evidence. The new study will target a wide variety of the new designer drugs using one procedure.

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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