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**Andrew M. Cuomo** - Governor

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## **Governor Cuomo Announces State Makes it Illegal to Sell or Possess Bath Salts or Synthetic Drugs**

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(August 7, 2012)

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced that the New York State Department of Health (DOH) has issued new regulations to crack down on the increasingly widespread use of bath salts and other synthetic drugs.

The new regulations, issued today by DOH and approved by the Public Health and Health Planning Council, will expand the existing list of prohibited drugs and chemicals to include dozens more substances that are now used to make synthetic drugs, better ensuring that distributors can no longer skirt the law by simply modifying the drug's ingredients. In addition, the regulations will allow for the first time an owner of an establishment and/or an employee selling synthetic drugs to be charged with possession of an illicit substance. Further, to support enforcement, the regulations will increase the criminal penalties for those who violate the rules. Violators will face fines up to \$500 and potentially up to 15 days in jail.

"Bath salts and other synthetic drugs pose a direct, serious threat to public health and safety, and we must do everything we can to remove these harmful substances from sale and distribution in New York," Governor Cuomo said. "The actions we are announcing today attack the problem by helping our law enforcement officers enforce the rules, expanding the list of banned substances used to manufacture bath salts, and imposing tougher penalties so those who sell these drugs are held accountable."

Over the past year, there has been a dangerous rise in instances of New Yorkers using synthetic drugs. In 2011, there were 39 reported emergency room visits in upstate New York as a result of bath salts. Already in 2012, there have been 191 such visits with 120 occurring this past June and July. According to the New York State Poison Control Center, in 2010 there were only 20 calls concerning synthetic marijuana poisonings. There were 291 in 2011, and there were already 321 through the first six months of 2012.

Bath salts and other synthetic drugs are manufactured with a similar, but slightly modified structure of controlled substances that are listed on Schedule I of the state and/or federal controlled substances laws as a means to avoid existing drug laws. These designer drugs can be - and are - continually chemically modified in the attempt to avoid legal repercussions.

In an effort to mask their true purpose, these products are marketed as "bath salts" or as "legal alternatives to marijuana." They are currently sold online, in small convenience stores, smoke shops, and other retail outlets. When consumed, these substances produce dangerous effects similar to cocaine and amphetamines, including hallucinations, paranoia, delusions, suicidal thoughts, and violent behavior as well as chest pains, increased blood pressure, and increased heart rates.

Bath Salts are sold under names including, White Lightning, Snow Leopard, Tranquility, Zoom, Ivory Wave, Red Dove, Vanilla Sky, and others. Synthetic marijuana is sold as Spice, K2, Blaze and Red Dawn X among other names.

Although federal law bans the manufacture or sale of many of these substances, as a result of the new regulations put in place today, local law enforcement officials for the first time will be able to pursue perpetrators under state laws and refer violators to local District Attorneys for prosecution.

The State Health Department and the New York State Police will coordinate investigations and arrests with local law enforcement and district attorneys. New criminal penalties will include a fine up to \$500 and or up to 15 days in jail. New civil penalties will include a fine of up to \$2,000 per violation.

The Governor also announced a new toll-free hotline 1-888-99SALTS (1-888-997-2587). Individuals with information about illegal distribution of bath salts or synthetic drugs are encouraged to call this hotline. For more information visit: <http://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/narcotic/index.htm> .

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