All about the 'bath salts' that aren't really for your bath

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We've all heard about the infamous "Causeway Cannibal."

Rudy Eugene earned the name after using his bare teeth to rip apart Ronald Poppo's face on a Miami causeway before being shot and killed by a police officer on May 26.

If the police are right, bath salts may have sparked the attack reported around the world.

These aren't your regular bath salts. You won't find them at Bed Bath & Beyond. And you wouldn't plop them into a hot bath after a tiring day at the office.

Too costly for the bath

On the street, bath salts are touted as fake cocaine, a potent hallucinogen not to be confused with synthetic marijuana.

Both are designer drugs, but fake pot is sold as herbal incense and promises — but does not always deliver — a marijuana-like high.

It's easy to tell the safe stuff from the bad stuff — by the price.

A 6-pound bag of Epsom salts sells for $5 at the grocery store. Bath salts that get you high sell for $40 a gram.

They are snorted, swallowed and sometimes smoked.

"It is very much like cocaine," said Dr. Morton Levitt, a pathologist and chairman of the Integrated Medical Science Department at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. "It creates a state of euphoria."

Users can also experience extreme paranoia, elevated heart rate and blood pressure, extremely high body temperature, sleep deprivation, vivid hallucinations, enhanced strength, hostility and aggression.

"[They] can hear voices, become paranoid," said Dr. Randy Katz, medical director of emergency services for Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood. "They can endure pain that a typical person couldn't handle. It can make them stronger."
Easy to get

Like synthetic marijuana, "bath salts" are sold online and behind the counter at convenience stores and gas stations.

One Sunoco station in Pompano Beach keeps boxes of "Ivory Dove Ultra" out of sight behind the counter. You have to ask for the stuff by name.

One 200-mg packet of Ivory Dove will set you back $16, but some brands sell for as much as $35.

The pink and silver packaging of Ivory Dove Ultra shows a woman's perfectly manicured feet covered with cucumbers.

The listing of ingredients includes Epsom salts, and the packet warns that its contents are "not for human consumption" and not for sale to minors.

The packet also warns: "In case of consumption, contact doctor immediately."

Why call them "bath salts"?

To mask their intended use, said David Gross, special agent supervisor with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in Tallahassee.

"They had to call them something," he said.

In October 2011, the DEA banned sale of the chemicals used to make "bath salts." Florida is among at least 37 states that have issued a similar ban.

The manufacturers had an easy fix: change the chemicals and it's legal again. They've come up with new compounds that are more dangerous than the previous ones.

"At this point, who knows what it is," Gross said. "We're now seeing people becoming violently ill to the point of hospitalization after ingesting these substances, and that is definitely on the rise."

Sales up since cannibal attack

A sales clerk at Peace Pipe says the Oakland Park smoke shop has been getting more inquiries about bath salts since the Causeway Cannibal attack.

You won't find bath salts at Peace Pipe — or synthetic marijuana, for that matter.

"It's not FDA-approved, it's not natural, it's not legal, it's made in a bathtub, and anyone who sells it should be put to death," shop owner Matthew Ward said. "We used to sell herbal incense, but we stopped because of the health hazards. It's a drug, just like the bath salts. And it needs to
Ward hasn't sold fake pot in two years and has never sold bath salts.

"I care about following the rules and not killing people," he said.

**Why can't they just say no?**

Addicts are driven by the urge to get high, said John Giordano, owner of G&G Holistic Addiction Treatment Center in North Miami Beach, which treats people hooked on "bath salts" and other designer drugs.

"Addicts are always interested in getting high and trying something new," he said.

They don't care if the bath salts, continually altered by street chemists, might turn them into psychotic face-eaters.

"When they see reports about people running down the street naked and eating someone's face, addicts think that's funny," Giordano said. "Their brains are not working properly. Normal people would see a guy stoned out of his mind, falling down, being made fun of, and say, 'What the heck is wrong with this guy?' An addict would see the same guy and say, 'He must be on some really good stuff. Where can I get some?''"

Jimmy Hewett, a chronic user of fake pot, gave up snorting bath salts when his girlfriend threatened to leave him. But he's thinking about trying them again.

Hewett was nonchalant when asked how he could be sure he wouldn't go pycho and eat someone's face.

"Because I have plenty of food in the fridge," he said without even the trace of a smile.

Hewett thinks the Causeway Cannibal overdosed on bath salts — or whatever he was taking.

**Cops on the lookout**

Police aren't getting any new training to deal with people going nuts on bath salts or anything else, said Travis Mandell, spokesman for the Fort Lauderdale Police Department.

That's because they already know how to deal with whackos.

"We're trained in dealing with someone whacked out on drugs already," he said. "The symptoms of someone under the influence of bath salts mimics the symptoms of narcotics."