



CBJ readying to outlaw synthetic cannabis

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By Sarah Day | JUNEAU EMPIRE

The City and Borough of Juneau may soon preempt the state in making synthetic marijuana illegal. A draft ordinance could be ready by the next Borough Assembly meeting.

City Attorney John Hartle gave an update Monday on research he'd done on the legal aspect of banning the substances, per the request of Assemblyman Merrill Sanford.

Synthetic marijuana is currently banned in 13 to 15 states, Sanford said. According to an article in the Boston Globe in late December, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration is looking at banning five of the chemicals used in synthetic marijuana — often called K2 or Spice. The drug is currently legal on a national basis, and can be purchased from smoke shops, convenience and grocery stores.

"There's been a number of cases reported at the hospital and some cases reported through the Juneau Police Department about the use and hazards of using the Spice drug," Sanford said. "Of course, some people can use it like other drugs and get away with it without having ill effects. Some people have been in the hospital for a week or more recovering from the use."

Sanford said synthetic marijuana is not regulated and the quantity of the components varies.

The City of Anchorage enacted an ordinance last month making use, possession or sale of synthetic marijuana illegal.

Hartle recommended drafting an ordinance based on Anchorage's. Hartle said typically this is the domain of state and federal governments. Bills criminalizing the substance are going before state lawmakers, Hartle said. "If those are adopted, those will take maybe nine months to take effect."

Hartle recommended the Assembly include an automatic repeal once a state law similar to the city ordinance goes into effect.

Sanford agreed. "I don't think we should lose any opportunities at all to get this stuff off the streets as much as possible," he said.

Juneau's police department hasn't yet had a chance to comment on the proposal.

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