

The Salem News

Online Edition

Saturday-Sunday, July 12-13, 2003

District attorney clamps down on spiked armbands

By THOMAS LAKE

Officials moved yesterday to cut off the area's supply of metal-spiked leather bands, an illegal product that accounted for more than 75 percent of all weapons violations in Danvers last year.

Acting on orders from District Attorney Jonathan Blodgett, Peabody police walked into Newbury Comics on Route 114 and told managers to remove the most dangerous bands from a display case near the front of the store.

Store manager Jake Hudson said he took two spiked neckbands off the shelf yesterday afternoon at the command of Sgt. Detective Charles Randall.

"They were the only ones we had that had really long spikes," he said.

Wristbands and neckbands with metal studs are still for sale, however. Randall was off duty last night and could not be reached for comment.

Blodgett said he ordered the crackdown in response to questions from The Salem News about stores that sell the illegal accessories. He was unaware of any other local retailers that carry the spiked bands.

In an interview Wednesday, Newbury Comics Chief Operating Officer Duncan Brown said he did not know the products had been outlawed.

Of the 56 reported weapons violations in

NEWS

BROWSER

- [Home](#)
- [Page One](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Police & Fire](#)
- [Court](#)
- [North Shore](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Record](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- Features*
- [Money](#)
- [Health](#)
- [At Home](#)
- [Weekender](#)
- [Living](#)
- [Classified](#)

Other pages on our Web Site

Navigate

Business Information
updated 24 hours a
day .

[Click Here.](#)

[Email a News Tip](#)

Danvers last year -- more than triple the figure from 2001 -- 44 were for spiked and studded wristbands, according to a report by Danvers Police public safety analyst Christopher Bruce. Most were worn by teens at the Liberty Tree Mall.

Just like blowguns, throwing stars, and double-edged knives, the wristbands are banned by the state's dangerous weapon law. A conviction for having one on you or in your car carries prison time of up to two and a half years.

To many teens, however, it appears the bands aren't weapons. Local police can't point to a single incident where a spiked wristband hurt someone.

"These items are fashion accessories, like a belt or a necklace," said Ruby Holiday, fashion editor for Gothic Beauty magazine. "These collars and wristbands were made to accentuate an outfit that would differentiate someone from general mainstream fashion. Nothing more. If we start completely banning these items, then where does it stop?"

Biker's weapon

In the summer of 1986, Patrolman Brian Knuuttila was called to a barroom fight at the Brookside Tavern in Shirley, Mass. The man who had lost the fight was covered in slashes across his face and neck, but his attacker didn't use a knife.

He wore a metal-spiked band on his right wrist.

"Not to quote my mother," said Knuuttila, who is now House vice chairman of the Joint Committee on Criminal Justice, "but you could put out an eye with one of those things."

Knuuttila spent 14 years as a police officer and then worked as a lawyer before he was elected to the state House of Representatives as a Democrat from Gardner. He said the state's dangerous weapon law was passed in

the early 1970s.

"Motorcycle gangs were at their zenith," he said. "That was their trademark, was these rather spiked wristbands."

So, while they were outlawing metal knuckles and blackjacks, lawmakers decided to ban spiked and studded wristbands as well.

"These were truly dangerous weapons," said Knuutila. "And unfortunately, these new (less dangerous) items fall within the parameters of this definition."

Chapter 269, Section 10, Subsection B of the general laws nixes possession of "any armband, made with leather which has metallic spikes, points or studs or any similar device made from any other substance."

It does not mention neckbands by name, but its broad language leaves the law open for interpretation.

In Salem, police confiscate spiked neckbands from teenagers -- some of which were intended for dogs and sold at local pet stores.

"You've got a guy with big arms," said Salem Police Sgt. Conrad Prosniewski, "he's going to fit into a neckband."

(Peabody Police Lt. Joseph Berardino said he hasn't seen people wearing the bands at Northshore Mall or anywhere else in the city; a spokesman for the Beverly Police did not return phone calls for this story.)

But in Danvers, Lt. Dave Woytovich said police grab only bands worn on arms -- not around the neck or the waist. Some feature sharp spikes as long as 2 inches.

Most kids don't know they're illegal, the officers said.

"An arrest is an option," said Prosniewski, "but it's probably the last resort option."

Danvers police say the problem was the greatest at Liberty Tree Mall because that's where teens hang out. In fact, of 120 people arrested at the mall between April 2000 and April 2002, police said, only nine were from Danvers. Thirty came from Lynn.

Through June of this year in Danvers, however, only three spiked wristbands have been confiscated.

"The word passed pretty rapidly," said Woytovich. "I really think they're not a problem anymore."

Dangerous merchandise?

Hot Topic is a mall chain store that sells trendy teen apparel in more than 300 locations nationwide. The store sells spiked and studded wristbands. In fact, a picture of a studded band appears at the bottom of nearly every page on the company's Web site.

But they won't sell the wristbands in Massachusetts.

"We agree with the law, that they're basically weapons," said Brad McDonald, an assistant manager for Hot Topic at Square One Mall in Saugus.

McDonald previously worked at a Hot Topic in Colorado, where the bands sold well. For the Massachusetts teens that come into his store looking for them, he has a speech prepared.

Don't wear them, he says. "It just gives (police) another reason, basically, to mess with you."

Newbury Comics has 19 locations in Massachusetts. All of them sold the wristbands before yesterday, Brown said.

After police left the Peabody store yesterday, however, the display case still held a wide selection of metal-studded wristbands and

neckbands.

Hudson said Randall had not ordered him to remove them.

"Anything that, basically, doesn't come to a point is fine," he said.

The offending bands may have been shipped to Peabody by mistake, Hudson added. Newbury Comics also has stores in New Hampshire, where the accessories are legal, he said.

"They've got to come to the realization that they're putting their patronage in peril by selling these things," Knuuttila said.

"Would the store be open to civil lawsuits if something happened as a result of selling those?" said Prosniewski. "Sure."

In the interview Wednesday, Brown said police had never told his store managers to stop selling the offending products.

"Anything can be a weapon," he said. "But I don't know if that makes feet illegal."

Staff writer

NEWS BROWSER	Home - Page One - Obituaries - Police & Fire - Court - North Shore - Sports - For The Record - Opinion - Money - Health - At Home - Weekender - Living - Classified
<input type="button" value="Back"/>	Email a News Tip - Contact Webmaster - Advertising - Circulation - Editor