Sales brisk as clock runs down on drug

By SUE MORRISON
Star-Telegram Writer

For one more week, you can — quite legally — try your brain at a discount.

At midnight Sunday, the law will become a federal crime. Until then, it's a going-out-of-business sale for folks who have been free to sell it, as well as legally, the drug called Ecstasy.

Ecstasy is a "designer" drug — a chemical derivative of a federally controlled drug, methylenedioxyamphetamine, commonly called MDA. Ecstasy was developed in the late 1970s, and the law only recently caught up with it. It wasn't classified and thus fell under no regulation; users and sellers couldn't be prosecuted.

Users say Ecstasy produces a feeling of euphoria. Medical studies have shown that MDA — a white powder that is sniffed, swallowed or injected intravenously — destroys nerve terminals in the brain, affecting motor functions and thought processes, perhaps irreversibly.

The difference between MDA and Ecstasy, called MDMA, AMT, XTC or MDA — is that it is made from methylenedioxyamphetamine instead of amphetamine.

That variation makes little difference in the effect of the drug. But for people to cut it into fastacting tablets, the chemical difference has translated into hun-


dreds of thousands of dollars in legal sales nationwide.

The sale falls out of the legal market at midnight Sunday. An emergency ban issued May 31 by the federal government takes effect, making Ecstasy a "Schedule I" controlled drug. It's the first time that has happened, and it is the first time in the history of the Comprehensive Drug Control Act of 1970, which went into effect March 1970, of a so-called "synthetic" drug, another designer drug.

The ban, effective July 1, anyone caught with less than 1 gram of Ecstasy can be assessed a maximum fine of $50,000 in prison and a $100,000 fine. For possession of more than 1 gram, the fine is $20,000 and a maximum of 5 years in prison.

In the interim, then, a price war is raging.

The tactics vary, including brawling on the streets wearing T-shirts saying "Save Ecstasy" and a one-month offer issuing "discount coupons."

The drugs are being sold at more than any other drug, but they still can be bought for less than $20 with the help of a dealer who would be willing to do "one-time" sales. Ecstasy could be bought for as little as $5 in some parts of the country, but not in the Dallas area, where it is sold for at least $25.

The operator of the custom leather goods shop in the Fort Worth area, a health bar on Maple Avenue in Dallas, said Ecstasy is popular among the group because it provides relief from the symptoms of depression in the community which are often accompanied by memory impairment.

"It's a fantastic condition that helps the body's resources to stay on track and is prevalent among middle-class adults," said Narcotics officers said Fort Worth police can go to a market to speak about the hot spots are Arlington and Dallas.

There is no legal way to ban bars, but they can be found openly selling Ecstasy, and the frequent user there may have to go to a dealer who will sell it to go to a bar and ask for Ecstasy there.

The room is in Oak Lawn, the gate section of Dallas. To buy Ecstasy from the leather goods shop on Saturday night, you first go to a man behind the counter for the drug. The cost was $21, 50, which included a 10 percent tax.

"The price was $28 per 4 ounce unit if you bought a dollar discount. "Cage any one of the jeans at the store shop or one of its subsidiaries with the date issued written on the back."

"In other words, leather shop owner said such a shop at a Dallas disco also sells Ecstasy and has vendors in the area who sell it to major Oak Lawn thoroughfare. The vendors wear T-shirts telling the story. The price, as low as $8 per ounce, leather shop owner said.

No vendors were seen Saturday night on Cedar Springs, however.

The intermin between legality and felony has provided some interesting scenes, the leather shop employee said, such as maximum penalty for the sale of Ecstasy. 