

Mint warns the 'Liberty Dollar' not legal tender

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WINTER HAVEN - Using a "Liberty Dollar" instead of a Federal Reserve-issued greenback might just cost you up to five years in prison.

The United States Mint recently issued a warning to consumers, stating that the purchase or use of Liberty Dollar medallions are not legal tender. And the decision to use them in retail stores or restaurants is causing prosecutors within the U.S. Justice Department to consider taking legal action.

Liberty Dollars have been marketed by the National Organization for the Repeal of the Federal Reserve Act and the Internal Revenue Code, which has no affiliation to the U.S. government.

NORFED is a private company based in Evansville, Ind., with claims that more than \$20 million dollars worth of Liberty Dollar coins and notes are in circulation.

Becky Bailey, public affairs director with the U.S. Mint Department, said the United States has the sole power to coin money under the Constitution. She said it's important to make sure all monetary transactions are uniformed.

"We issued the alert because we don't want consumers to be fooled," Bailey said. "If someone wants to collect Liberty Dollars, that's fine."

That's what John Schaal, a Winter Haven resident and on-line coin seller plans to do. He already has a private collection of 25 Liberty Dollars.

"I put them on my wall," Schaal said. "They are good looking coins. But, a person would be foolish to spend them."

Janet Folkerts, the executive director for nonprofit□ Spectrum Resources, which counsels people on debt reduction, said she and her clients talk about Liberty Dollars. She said Liberty Dollars doesn't intend to replace the greenback, but offers people a choice when it comes to using money.

"Liberty Dollars are totally legal," Folkerts said. "It's never been promoted as federal U.S. currency."

Even with the U.S. Mint's warning, Folkerts said it's been good publicity for Liberty Dollars, with more phone calls and generated interest in the private company's currency.

"The Liberty Dollar is the peoples' money, backed by silver and gold," Folkerts said. "The U.S. currency is backed by debt."