

Office of the Attorney General

Washington, D. C. 20530

February 8, 1982

Marijuana

The Honorable C. Everett Koop
Surgeon General
Hubert Humphrey Building
Room 716-G
200 Indiana Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear General Koop:

During the past several years there has been a great deal of discussion as to the long-term physiological effects of marijuana use on human beings. No definitive position has been taken since there was very minimal scientific research data available. Since 1960, however, marijuana use has escalated dramatically and several research projects have been undertaken. As a result, there is a considerable body of evidence which indicates that widespread and continued use of marijuana has significant effects. Past Surgeon Generals, despite health warnings on cigarettes, have not made any comments about the health hazards associated with continued marijuana smoking.

I would encourage the Surgeon General to immediately review the evidence regarding continued marijuana use and make a finding regarding the health hazards associated with marijuana use. A few findings of scientific research that I am aware of are summarized below.

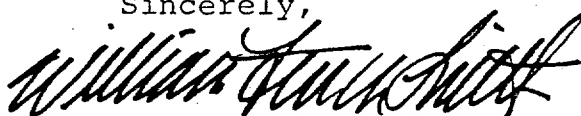
- o Research indicates that marijuana does have a detrimental effect on memory and cognition.
- o The National Institute on Drug Abuse study suggests that marijuana affects the cardiovascular system, the immune response, and the reproductive system.
- o A recent report on health promotion and disease prevention stated that young people now have a higher death rate than twenty years ago. Alcohol and drug abuse are listed among the most common health related problems for this age group.

- o The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has done a study that demonstrates that marijuana was used by a significant percentage of drivers involved in fatal accidents and in driving while intoxicated arrests.
- o Analysis of marijuana smoke reveals more tars and carcinogens than are present in tobacco smoke. Yet there is no public admonition against smoking marijuana as there is for cigarettes.

If you conclude that marijuana can be harmful to the smoker's health, it would be of inestimable help to drug enforcement and parent groups to make a warning statement public. There are currently thousands of parent groups throughout the United States that have formed a national coalition to stop marijuana and other substance use. They have had some recent successes since their formulation in 1978. However, a national medical authority making a specific and strong statement against marijuana use would provide much needed support for concerned parents. Moreover, the Surgeon General has official communication channels throughout the medical community to remind health professionals and family physicians of their professional responsibilities by advising parents and patients about the potential ill effects of marijuana use.

I encourage you to become an effective ally of the Department of Justice in its effort to combat escalating drug use among Americans. The Surgeon General has certain institutional powers and considerable prestige that he can direct towards eliminating or reducing the justification for the social use of marijuana. A well-publicized statement followed up through professional channels will do much to reduce the acceptance of marijuana throughout society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "William French Smith", written in a cursive, flowing style.

William French Smith
Attorney General