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September 10, 2001

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Bernard A. Schwetz, D.V.M., Ph.D.
Acting Principal Deputy Commissioner
Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 1471
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Dr. Schwetz:

I am writing regarding dietary supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids and the use of these supplements by athletes.

Recent press accounts have reported the deaths of at least eleven football players this year, including six high school students, three college players, and two professional players during or immediately following football games or practices. Some news accounts have questioned whether dietary supplements containing ephedrine may have played a role in several of these deaths. Ephedrine can cause heart arrhythmias and stroke. It can also be particularly dangerous for athletes training in the summer because it can contribute to heatstroke.

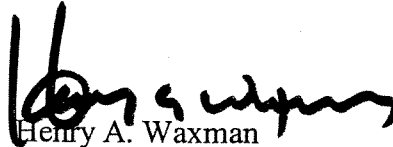
As you are aware, the Food and Drug Administration has received over 1400 reports of adverse events relating to dietary supplements containing ephedrine. These reports include events such as myocardial infarction and stroke, which have been documented in the scientific literature as possible side effects of ephedrine. Data from poison control centers show an increase in adverse event reports relating to dietary supplements containing ephedrine from 1997 to 1999, with about a third of the reports involving individuals under 19 years old. The National Collegiate Athletic Association has recently released a study that shows an increase of college athletes admitting to ephedrine use, with now close to 4% admitting to use.

Given that ephedrine use is on the rise among young athletes, FDA should expeditiously investigate reports that the death of some athletes may be related to ephedrine use. I urge you to investigate those deaths where there is evidence of supplement use to determine whether or not ephedrine, or any other dietary supplement or drug, played any role whatsoever in these deaths.

Bernard A. Schwetz, D.V.M., Ph.D
September 10, 2001
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If you have any questions about this request, please call me or Sarah Despres of my staff at (202) 225-5420.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry A. Waxman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "H".

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member

cc: The Honorable Dan Burton