



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

AUG 3 1987

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Public Law 99-570, Section 4017 (the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986), expressed the sense of the Senate that the Public Health Service should:

- o assess the potential educational impact of health warning labels on containers of alcoholic beverages; and
- o transmit a report to Congress on this topic, including findings on the impact and potential educational benefits of health warning labels and recommendations for specific label language.

We have completed the review of research literature on the effects of health warning labels on products currently labeled--tobacco, foods, drugs, and others. This review demonstrates that health warning labels do have the potential to affect consumer behavior, particularly in combination with other educational efforts. Although studies of the impact of health warning labels in "real world" situations have concluded they have an impact on behavior, as the report indicates, they "cannot be regarded as conclusive evidence that health warning labels are necessarily effective in all situations." As you are aware, this Department has used health warning labels and other educational approaches in the areas of tobacco, food, and drugs. The report of our review is enclosed.

Consumption of alcoholic beverages is associated with a wide range of serious health hazards including birth defects, impaired motor skills, adverse drug reactions, excess morbidity, and premature mortality due to liver damage, hypertension, and cancer among other illnesses. Nearly 100,000 deaths are attributed annually to alcohol consumption. In addition, the economic and social costs associated with alcohol use are staggering--in 1983, they reached \$117 billion; by 1990, they are estimated to reach \$136 billion; and, in 1995, to increase by an additional \$14 billion to \$150 billion. In brief, the magnitude and severity of these health effects argue for sustained and highly visible public health efforts.

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I have informed the Secretary of the Treasury of our views and conclusions. We would be pleased to provide more information on the scientific evidence available on the health hazards of alcohol, and I would be happy to discuss our departmental approach with you further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Otis R. Bowen M.D.", with a stylized, cursive script.

Otis R. Bowen, M.D.
Secretary

Enclosure

LIST OF MEMBERS OF CONGRESS RECEIVING SECRETARY'S LETTER
TRANSMITTING REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE
ON HEALTH WARNING LABELS
(AUGUST 3, 1987)

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable Christopher J. Dodd
Chairman
Subcommittee on Children, Family,
Drug Abuse and Alcoholism
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable Strom Thurmond
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Children, Family,
Drug Abuse and Alcoholism
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate

The Honorable John Dingell
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

The Honorable Norman F. Lent
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health and the Environment
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

The Honorable Edward Madigan
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Health and the Environment
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives