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# Key distinction on FDA, supplements

The Boston Globe

November 13, 2009

IN THE Nov. 2 editorial "Police these pills and powders," you write that the Food and Drug Administration cannot take action to remove "dietary supplements" that contain illegal steroids until there are reports of adverse effects in users. In fact, synthetic steroids are not allowed in supplements, and the FDA has issued 28 warning letters since 2004 against companies marketing such products. These actions were taken based not on adverse events, but on claims made on product labels and on FDA analyses.

In announcing its most recent such enforcement action in July, the FDA clarified that these products "are not dietary supplements, but instead are unapproved and misbranded drugs." The Globe fails to acknowledge this important distinction.

The American Herbal Products Association agrees, as the Globe concludes, that supplement users have "a right to know what's going into their bodies." Legally labeled dietary supplements are required to list every contained ingredient so that consumers do have this knowledge. Any product that fails to do so is misbranded, and the FDA, under current law, can seize the product and issue warnings or bring criminal actions against its marketers.

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