



MAJORITY AND MINORITY STAFFS
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Fact Sheet

GAO Finds Anabolic Steroids Easily Purchased Without Prescriptions, Present Law Enforcement Challenge

GAO today released a new report, *Anabolic Steroids Are Easily Purchased Without A Prescription and Present Significant Challenges to Law Enforcement Authorities*. The report, requested by Government Reform Chairman Tom Davis and Ranking Minority Member Henry Waxman, finds that illegal anabolic steroids from foreign sources are widely available and easy to obtain over the Internet.

Using simple web searches, GAO was able to find a variety of websites “openly and boldly” offering dozens of anabolic steroids for sale. GAO placed orders with 22 of these websites and obtained 14 shipments.

Ten of these orders were from foreign countries — Italy, China, or Greece — and all ten contained illegal steroids including stanozolol, methandrostenolone, oxymetholone, and testosterone propionate. All came in plain, unmarked packages.

GAO also received four shipments from the United States. Although all the websites claimed to sell anabolic steroids or products that have the muscle building effects of steroids, none contained steroids. These contained substances such as legal amino acids or other dietary supplements.

GAO also identified smuggling of anabolic steroids — often from Mexico — across international borders and into the United States as an important part of the illegal distribution network. Smugglers take orders from steroid customers in the United States and either purchase steroids that they or their partners bring back to the United States or work with a partner to have the steroids mailed directly from foreign countries to customers in the United States.

Law enforcement authorities contacted by GAO indicated that they faced significant challenges in their efforts to investigate, prosecute, and deter steroid traffickers. These challenges included the following obstacles:

- Most anabolic steroids distributed illegally in the United States come from abroad, and the steroids are legal in their country of origin. As a result, U.S. legal authorities receive little assistance from legal officers in the countries of origin.

STEROIDS EASILY PURCHASED WITHOUT PRESCRIPTION

- The anonymity of the Internet — and the ease with which websites and e-mail identities can be installed, moved, and removed — makes it difficult for authorities to identify, track, and shut down web sites providing illegal steroids.
- The inspection process for incoming mail is slow and inefficient, and inspection processes are complicated by the fact that dealers can hide steroids in items such as speakers, blenders, alarm clocks, compact disk cases, and hollowed sections of books. In addition, steroid traffickers, by using online USPS express mail tracking systems, can determine whether and where a package has been detained by Customs, tipping them off to law enforcement activities, such as “controlled deliveries” by law enforcement authorities posing as Postal Service employees, designed to catch illegal traffickers.
- Federal penalties for steroid trafficking are weak and fail to provide adequate deterrence. Even the largest traffickers, if caught, face penalties of only zero to eight months.