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THE "DUMB COPS" IMAGE

One day this past fall we were going through the daily Washington ritual of reviewing the current issue of the *Federal Register*—which is the principal means of keeping track of what is happening in the executive branch of government—when we spotted reference to a Presidential Proclamation which caught our eye. Specifically, the entry pertained to the designation of "Drug Abuse Prevention Week" and the thought struck us that this annual effort to promote means to control the problems of drug abuse was a bit later than usual this year.

Upon turning to the Proclamation in that issue of the *Federal Register*, the explanation became immediately clear. Although the Proclamation was signed by President Ford on October 18 and printed rather promptly in the *Federal Register* dated October 20, nevertheless, the week being so designated was indicated as beginning October 17. Normally, such Proclamations appear at least two weeks or so before the pertinent date and certainly not after the observance is to begin.

Those familiar with the operation of executive agencies will recognize that the tardiness here does not lie with the President, or the White House staff, or the *Federal Register* but, rather, with the particular agency having primary responsibility for the subject area. In this instance, we suspect that the fault lies with the Drug Enforcement Administration of the Department of Justice.

Whether or not DEA was responsible for this small flub, there is no question that the agency has been clearly at fault for a long string of other foul-ups and errors which, *in toto*, project the image of an inefficient, bungling agency.

When DEA was originally established some half-dozen years or so ago, a strong argument was made that responsibility for drug control involved scientific, medical, and other technical knowledge, which argues rather strongly that the agency should be placed within the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare rather than the Department of Justice. Others, however, argued vocally that drug abuse control basically is a regulatory and enforcement activity and, as such, the agency more properly should be made part of the Department of Justice where other federal investigative and police activities are primarily centralized.

In recent months, we have seen repeated instances where official notices, proposals, or finalized regulations issuing from DEA and published in the *Federal Register* have used terminology and nomenclature to describe the drugs involved which have been confusing, inconsistent, or otherwise inaccurate. In an effort to correct this problem, at our suggestion, the office of the United States Adopted Names (USAN) Council specifically communicated with the DEA and offered assistance in this regard. Not only did the DEA fail to take advantage of this offer but, in fact, actually repeated on at least two later dates the very error cited by the USAN Council office as an example of incorrect drug nomenclature being employed by the agency.

There are many dedicated and well-qualified professionals who serve in the DEA. Undoubtedly, the bureaucratic bungling of the agency such as that described above and which projects a "dumb cop" image is highly embarrassing to those professional staff members. What is particularly unfortunate, however, is that this problem is so unnecessary. It could be readily corrected if those responsible for determining general agency policy and direction were just a bit more sensitive to the need to exercise reasonable sophistication and care in the scientific and medically related aspects of their field of responsibility.