

FDA seizes prescriptions sent to US from abroad
By Bloomberg News | March 10, 2005

The Food and Drug Administration is seizing prescription drugs shipped to US patients from overseas under I-Save Rx, the program sponsored by five states to help residents obtain low-cost medicines.

At least 54 customers said the FDA confiscated orders sent from Britain since late January, said Tony Howard, president of CanaRx Services Inc., the program's Tecumseh, Ontario-based supplier. The orders were worth \$13,000, Howard said.

"I think the FDA's in collusion with the drug companies," Philip Flavin, 57, a disabled former respiratory therapist from Glenview, Ill., said. Instead of receiving his order of Merck & Co.'s bone-strengthening drug Fosamax in January, he got a letter from the FDA saying the package had been seized by the US Post Office.

I-Save Rx, set up by Illinois Democratic Governor Rod Blagojevich in October, allows residents to order from Canada, Ireland, and Britain at savings of as much as 50 percent, according to the program's website.

Drug makers led by Pfizer Inc. oppose cross-border purchases of medicines, which totaled about \$1.4 billion last year, contending that imports leave customers vulnerable to counterfeit drugs.

While the FDA considers all of I-Save's shipments illegal, the agency hasn't targeted them for confiscation, said William Hubbard, the drug safety agency's associate commissioner of policy and planning.

The FDA can target particular shipments, Hubbard said. The agency seized about 450 packages in July from another Canadian Internet pharmacy, CanadaRx.net, that passed through the Bahamas, Hubbard said.

Kansas, Missouri, Wisconsin and Vermont also participate in I-Save, while Minnesota and a number of US cities have similar programs. The FDA is "just enforcing US law," said Jack Cox, a spokesman for New York-based Pfizer, the world's largest .

"They're only able to inspect a small number of packages, so the vast majority of illegal shipments are going to make it in," he said.

© Copyright <http://www.boston.com/help/bostoncom_info/copyright> 2005 The New York Times Company