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TITLE=SCIENCE REPORT – OxyContin Warning

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This is the VOA Special English SCIENCE REPORT.

The federal government and manufacturers of the drug OxyContin have increased warnings about its use. Directions on the containers of the pain-killing medicine are being changed. They now must include a warning that the effects of OxyContin are like morphine, another drug that fights pain.

The warning also must say that misusing the drug can kill. Law-enforcement officials say misuse of OxyContin is linked to as many as one-hundred deaths.

The new warning labels also carry the message that only some patients should take OxyContin. The drug is meant for people suffering moderate to severe pain over extended periods. A doctor must write an order for this medicine.

Doctors say people can become physically dependent on OxyContin. People can suffer from withdrawal problems if they cannot get it. Drugstore owners report that people are stealing the drug from their stores. Illegal drug dealers are selling OxyContin on the streets.

OxyContin pills contain the pain-killing substance oxycodone. OxyContin can release oxycodone over a twelve-hour period. Taken correctly, an OxyContin pill is swallowed whole. However, an increasing number of people are crushing OxyContin into powder. They breathe the powder in, or force it through the skin with a needle. These methods release the effects of the medicine at one time. This results in a temporary feeling of happiness similar to the effect of the illegal drug, heroin.

The company Purdue Pharma of Stamford, Connecticut began selling the drug in Nineteen-Ninety-Six. Many doctors praise its effectiveness in treating cancer, severe burns and other painful conditions.

Yet protests against misuse of the drug are spreading. So is legal action against Purdue Pharma and a company it works with, Abbott Laboratories in Chicago. For example, West Virginia began legal cases against the two companies in June. The state accuses them of helping cause misuse of the drug by using aggressive sales methods.

A Purdue spokesman said the company has stopped selling OxyContin pills that contain large amounts of the drug. He said Purdue has warned doctors about the drug in several ways. He also says the company has spent millions to dollars to research

pain-killers that could not be easily misused.

This VOA Special English Science Report was written by Jerilyn Watson.

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