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## What is a "narcotic" drug?

The first thing you should understand about the word "narcotic" is that it is used incorrectly more than it is used correctly. One good, quick way to tell whether someone actually knows anything about this subject is to listen to their use of this word. If they tell you that marijuana, cocaine, and meth are "narcotics" then count them among the vast legions of totally clueless people on this subject.

The word "narcotic" comes from the Greek word "narkos", meaning sleep. Therefore, "narcotics" are drugs that induce sleep. Specifically, that means the opiates such as heroin, morphine and related drugs. This is the correct meaning, so you should accept no other.

Cocaine and meth are not "narcotics". They are "stimulants", the exact opposite of a "narcotic". They cause people to be more awake and more active, not sleepy. Calling them : "narcotics" makes as much sense as calling coffee a "narcotic".

The classification of other drugs such as marijuana, alcohol, and others is open to question. (That is a subject for another page.) Some might call them "tranquilizers", "depressants", or even "hallucinogens". Marijuana and alcohol may even have a tendency to induce sleep at times. However, calling them "narcotics" simply shows a lack of understanding of the different effects.

The problem is that US Government officials, and others who enforce and support drug prohibition, tend to refer to all illegal drugs as "narcotics". They do that for three major reasons.

One reason is that they are genuinely ignorant about these drugs and their effects. That may sound like a strange thing to say about our top drug law enforcers -- people supposed to be the top experts in this field -- but I can assure you that it is 100 percent true. After years of talking to them, I haven't met one yet -- from the official United States Drug Czar to the local narcotics officers on the street -- who could pass the most basic factual quiz on the subject.

The second reason is that "narcotic" sounds dangerous and makes good headlines. Consider how attractive newspaper headlines would be if government officials proclaimed the dangers of "tranquilizers" (which narcotics are, in some respects). It just doesn't have the same sex appeal.

The third reason is that it blurs the line between things like marijuana and heroin. Police can't take a lot of credit for busting someone with an ounce of pot, so they call it a "narcotics bust."

Watch for how people use the word "narcotic". It will tell you instantly whether their opinion on the subject is really worth the puff of air it takes to speak it.

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