

## CASE 8

Heroin and cocaine addiction are rampant in the United States. It is estimated that there are three million cocaine users in the United States, and one million habitual heroin users. Heroin use is rapidly overtaking cocaine use, as poppies are easier to grow than cocaine, and opium is easier to smuggle and is more profitable than cocaine. Most of the opium that finds its way to the United States comes from Colombia or Mexico, while Afghanistan supplies most the European drug market. Even so, Afghanistan's opium trade significantly impacts the United States.

In accordance with Islamic law, the Taliban in Afghanistan initially fought the opium trade. The Taliban reversed its stance in recent years, and now protects and taxes Afghanistan's opium business, using drug profits to support its activities. Some success in eradicating opium poppies has been achieved by paying farmers to plant legal agricultural crops instead of poppies, but this is not a great incentive. An acre of poppies produces up to 500 times the income of agricultural products. Despite a \$420 million effort by the US government in 2006 to eradicate Afghanistan's opium trade by plowing poppy plants under or trampling them underfoot, the 2006 Afghanistan poppy harvest surpassed the previous year's record crop, producing a heroin supply so abundant that it exceeded the demand of the world's addicts. The use of mycoherbicides offers another option that could be used to eradicate illegal drug crops.

Mycoherbicides are living organisms that invade plants, introducing a toxin that sometimes kills the plant; or if the plant lives until harvest, the toxin may cause illness and death when ingested by humans or animals. Farmers and foreign government leaders oppose defoliation, claiming that along with destroying drug crops, spraying harms people, destroys legitimate agricultural crops, pollutes waterways, and is detrimental to livestock and other animals. Every United States government agency that has studied mycoherbicides has concluded the organisms are pernicious, can be genetically unstable and mutate rapidly, and may have a disastrous impact on the environment. Although international consensus on the danger of mycoherbicides is lacking, many countries consider their use to be a form of biological warfare. Experiments have been conducted to extract and intensify mycoherbicide toxins for this use.

The United States House of Representative has twice passed Resolution 2829, the Office of National Drug Control Policy Reauthorization Act, although both times the legislation stalled in the Senate. One of the act's provisions requires "a plan to conduct, on an expedited basis, a scientific study of the use of mycoherbicide as a means of illicit drug crop elimination...in a major drug producing nation" (HR 2829, Section 6n). In the past, the United States has tied foreign aid money to mycoherbicide spraying.