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# Clinton may allow marijuana tests



WASHINGTON (AP) — The Clinton administration decided Monday not to lift a ban on medicinal marijuana, but said it may allow privately funded experiments to try to conclude whether the illegal drug has any real health benefits.

The Public Health Service made the announcement in letters to members of Congress who had urged the administration to overturn former President Bush's ban on medicinal marijuana.

"Sound scientific studies supporting these claims are lacking despite anecdotal claims that smoked marijuana is beneficial," wrote Assistant Health Secretary Philip Lee.

"This is a bureaucracy that is too dumb to figure out whether a weed could help AIDS patients survive," responded Robert Randall, the first person to legally receive medicinal marijuana under a government program.

Starting in 1976, certain patients who didn't find relief in traditional medications could apply to the Food and Drug Administration for permission to use marijuana.

The FDA allowed medicinal marijuana to: ease nausea and loss of appetite caused by cancer and AIDS treatments; ease muscle spasms for people

with spinal cord injuries or multiple sclerosis; and alleviate the eye pressure that blinds glaucoma sufferers such as Randall.

Some studies showed marijuana helped those diseases, but others disagreed. Bush in 1992 banned the medical testing or use of marijuana, saying it could harm patients who had safer alternatives. The 15 people then receiving the drug were allowed to continue; eight are still alive.

After patients' outcry, Clinton officials in January began reviewing the ban. In Monday's letter to Rep. Dan Hamburg, D-Calif., the administration concluded there are legal drugs to help all the diseases marijuana advocates fear, and that marijuana studies aren't scientifically sound.

The Drug Policy Foundation of Washington already is discussing such trials, said president Arnold Trebach. "But while that is being settled — and it could take a while — there is no reason in the world to say to a patient who is suffering from AIDS or cancer that you cannot try this drug."

"Our people tell us these other medicines make them very sick," said Meg Ryan O'Donnell, spokeswoman for Hamburg who, along with seven other lawmakers, had pushed to restart the marijuana program. "But this is it for us, there's nothing else we can do."

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# Comet fragments begin bombardment

GREENBELT, Md. (AP) — The first comet fragments struck Jupiter Monday with an explosion several times more powerful than all of the world's nuclear weapons, leaving black scars the size of the earth.

A Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet fragment called G slammed into the gas bag-like planet and set off a fireball that was briefly brighter in some wavelengths than the whole planet. Some observing instruments watching from 480 million miles away were momentarily blinded.

Fragment G was followed by an equally large fragment H. At least two more of the 21 fragments of Shoemaker-Levy 9 are of similar size. By Monday afternoon, nine fragments had smashed into Jupiter since the bombardment started on Saturday. The last fragment is expected to hit the planet Friday.

Beginning Wednesday, three fragments will slam into the planet's upper atmosphere at about the same spot over a 20-hour period.

"You'll have three — boom, boom, boom," said Heidi Hammel of the Space Telescope Science Institute on Monday. "You are going to have one heck of a mess."

The first of the three fragments, Q, is expected to hit just before 4 a.m. EDT on Wednesday. R follows 10 hours later and S will be 10 hours after that. Jupiter's rotation is 10 hours, which means the

fragments will hit at nearly the same spot on the planet.

Comet fragment G, the largest in the comet train, hit the planet early Monday with the biggest explosion yet — estimated at the energy equivalent of 6 million megatons.

Later, a Hubble Space Telescope image showed that G's explosion created an almost perfect circle, centered with a dark spot and then shaded with a bruise-like edge.

"So there is now a black eye on Jupiter," Hammel said. She said the eye portion of the scar is 80 percent of the size of Earth, and the bruise area goes far beyond.

If fragment G had hit Earth, said Eugene Shoemaker, a U.S. Geological Survey scientist and co-discoverer of the comet, "the crater would pretty well have covered all of Rhode Island."

"It would also blanket the Earth with a fine layer of dust that would blacken the sun," he said.

Nonetheless, Shoemaker said the impact from a G-sized fragment would not be as damaging as the asteroid that hit the Earth 65 million years ago and killed much of the planet's life.

Pulled by Jupiter's immense gravity, the comet fragments strike the top of the planet's atmosphere traveling at about 130,000 miles an hour. The pieces, described by Shoemaker as "icy mud balls," send powerful shock waves through

Jupiter's atmosphere, creating instant heat that may reach 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

A bubble of superheated gas then rebounds upward, creating the fireball detected by telescopes on Earth.

"The energy released is beyond any of our experiences on Earth," said Lucy McFadden, a University of Maryland astronomer.

Views from the Hubble Space Telescope and from observatories on Earth show a path of black scars across the southern face of Jupiter, which could last for many days. Large black clouds have formed and spread at each impact point.

Although it is 11 times Earth's diameter, most of Jupiter's sphere is hydrogen. The gas gets denser and denser with depth, and a solid core is thought to be at the center.

Shoemaker said fragment G may have punched up to 36 miles into Jupiter's upper atmosphere. At that point, the pressure from the shock wave becomes so great that the fragment is crushed and stopped. This is followed immediately by the fireball.

All of the comets are hitting the backside of Jupiter, as viewed from Earth, but the fireballs rise so high that the Hubble is able to spot the cloud poking above the horizon. Also, Jupiter rotates once every 10 hours, so the impact sites quickly move into view.

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