

Pfizer restricts sale of its drugs used in executions

BLOOMBERG
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Pfizer, the US's biggest drug-maker, introduced a new policy designed to restrict sales of seven of its drugs that have been used in lethal injections at prisons across the US, saying it strongly objects to the use of its medicines for the purpose of capital punishment.

The decision means all 25 companies that produce medicines used in executions have blocked their sale for that purpose, according to Reprieve, an international human rights organization that opposes the death penalty.

"Pfizer's actions cement the pharmaceutical industry's opposition to the misuse of medicines," said Maya Foa, director of Reprieve, in a statement. "This will mean that all FDA-approved manufacturers of all execution drugs have spoken out against the misuse of medicines in lethal injections and taken steps to prevent it."

Pfizer's new distribution system will limit sales to specific wholesalers, distributors and direct purchasers, who must then pledge not to resell the drugs to correctional institutions for use in executions. Any government purchasing groups must certify that the medicines they buy are for their own use, for medically prescribed patient care, and won't be sold or shared with any others.

"Pfizer will consistently monitor the distribution of

these seven products, act upon findings that reveal noncompliance, and modify policies when necessary to remain consistent with our stated position against the improper use of our products in lethal injections," the New York-based company said in a statement posted on its website.

The limited-distribution products are: pancuronium bromide, potassium chloride, propofol, midazolam, hydromorphone, rocuronium bromide and vecuronium bromide.

Lethal injection was the primary method of execution

in the 31 states that allowed the death penalty as of July 2015, with more than 1,260 inmates dying from the practice since 1976, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

Most lethal injections begin with an anaesthetic or a sedative, followed by pancuronium bromide, which paralyses the inmate, according to the nonprofit group. Potassium chloride is then given to stop the heart.

The number of inmates who have been put to death has declined in recent years as correctional facilities had difficulty getting the medicines used in lethal injections, activists raised concerns about the practice and stories emerged about undue suffering and bungled execution attempts. While there were three botched executions in 2014 alone, the US Supreme Court upheld the practice in a decision issued last year.

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