

FDA official resigns over contraception policy

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WASHINGTON (AP) — A high-ranking Food and Drug Administration official resigned Wednesday in protest over the agency's refusal to allow over-the-counter sales of emergency contraception.

Susan Wood, director of FDA's Office of Women's Health, announced her resignation in an e-mail to colleagues at the agency. The e-mail was released by contraception advocates.

The FDA last Friday postponed indefinitely its decision on whether to allow the morning-after pill, called Plan B, to be sold without a prescription. The agency said it was safe for adults to use without a doctor's guidance but was unable to decide how to keep it out of the hands of young teenagers without a prescription — a decision contrary to the advice of its own scientific advisers.

"I can no longer serve as staff when scientific and clinical evidence, fully evaluated and recommended for approval by the professional staff here, has been overruled," wrote Wood, who also was assistant commissioner for women's health. "The recent decision announced by the Commissioner about emergency contraception, which continues to limit women's access to a product that would reduce unintended pregnancies and reduce abortions, is contrary to my core commitment to improving and advancing women's health."

Plan B's maker has been trying for two years to begin nonprescription sales, and the FDA's latest postponement of its fate was a surprise: Commissioner Lester Crawford won Senate confirmation to take his job only after promising members of Congress to make a final decision by September 1.

Crawford announced Friday that the agency considered over-the-counter sales to women 17 and older fine, but that younger teens would still need a prescription — and that the agency was unable to decide how pharmacies could enforce an age limit, or even if it was legal to have such dual sales.