Judge wants Ecstasy OK'd for medical use

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WASHINGTON — An administrative law judge has recommended that the controversial drug MDMA, popularly known as Ecstasy, be dropped from the Drug Enforcement Administration's most restrictive list so that it may be used for medical purposes.

The 67-page decision by Francis L. Young, an administrative law judge for the agency, recommends that Ecstasy be treated as a routine prescription, similar to some barbiturates and amphetamines. Under statutory powers, agency Administrator John C. Lawn declared an emergency federal ban on Ecstasy on July 1 and placed the drug in the Schedule I category, which includes drugs such as heroin and marijuana.

Lawn has the final decision on whether to accept Young's recommendation. Although he has no timetable to make a decision, he is expected to rule by June 30, the date on which the one-year emergency ban expires.

Spokesman David Hoover said the agency had no comment on the judge's recommendation.

In a potential victory for drug companies, Young said that the judgment of the medical and scientific community, rather than the FDA, should be the guiding factor in a decision whether a drug is of "accepted medical use" — an important factor in how the Drug Enforcement Administration categorizes drugs.

"This recommendation would go a long way toward defining several terms in the Controlled Substances Act," said Robert Angarola, a Washington attorney representing two drug laboratories that were part of the proceedings. "It gives the DEA more latitude."

In his opinion, Young said that Lawn followed the law correctly in barring Ecstasy last July and observed that the administrator's action reflected a view "based on evidence then available to the agency."