

January 23, 2017

Urban Decay  
833 West 16th Street  
Newport Beach, CA 92663

Dear Urban Decay,

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Howard Weissman  
*Executive Director*

I am the Executive Director of NCADA, a non-profit organization dedicated to preventing harms associated with substance use. I am writing to add my voice and perspective to the group of individuals and organizations who have recently expressed concern regarding your eyeshadow titled "Druggie," from your After Dark Eyeshadow Palette.

I went to your website and observed that, as of today, this product is still listed. But as I continued to navigate your website to learn more about your company and corporate values, my concern now extends beyond your "Druggie" eyeshadow. Urban Decay frequently uses substance use-related terms in reference to your cosmetics—your rewards program is titled "Beauty Junkies" and includes phrases such as "addiction has its perks." Customers are even encouraged to earn more points with the cheer of "get higher and higher." I can only imagine how many high-fives were exchanged at that marketing meeting.

You boast that your company has been shaking up the industry for over 20 years. Perhaps in your 20 years of success, you've never encountered the damaging effects of substance use on individuals, families, and communities. I would be especially surprised if this were the case, given that a significant portion of your target audience is women. 15.8 million women (or 12.9 percent) ages 18 or older have used illicit drugs in the past year. (SAMHSA, 2014) According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, women may face unique issues when it comes to substance use, based on both differences in sex and gender. For example, women can use less of a substance over a shorter period of time before becoming addicted. Women also use substances for different reasons than men: controlling weight, fighting exhaustion, coping with pain, and self-treating mental health problems.

On the other hand, perhaps you have actually been witness to the deepening crisis of substance use across the country—for both women and men. If this is the case, then your branding and communications strategies reflect either an unwillingness within your company to acknowledge the devastating impact of substance use, or a branding initiative that is deliberately insensitive.

The flippant use of these negative terms by your company does nothing of value to increase understanding of or compassion for those wrestling with substance use disorders, and the depth of your callousness and/or ignorance serves as a reminder to organizations, such as ours, of how far we have to go in reducing stigma. I'd go further and assert that this language actually serves to undermine our efforts to reduce and prevent harms associated with alcohol and other drugs.

I urge you to think more critically about these products and their impact. What message do these products send, and what message is Urban Decay sending by promoting them and profiting from their sale?

Raising awareness about substance use is just a part of what we do, and you are welcome to visit our websites for more information about the other valuable services we provide to our community. But what I hope for even more is that we might engage in a productive conversation about substance use that leads to a deepened understanding of the issue by your company, and a marketing/sales approach that respects the sensitivities and sensibilities of your customers.

I thank you, in advance, for listening, and hope that this letter serves as a starting point for progress.

Sincerely,



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