

Dr. Koop: Video games may generate violence

WASHINGTON — Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said Wednesday he was giving a "purely personal judgment" when he made an "off-the-cuff" remark indicating video games may incite children to violence.

In remarks to the University of Pittsburgh's Western Psychiatric Institute Tuesday night, Koop said games like Pacman may be to blame for inciting violence. "Everything is 'zap the enemy,'" Koop said. "There's nothing constructive in the game."

In a written statement Wednesday, Koop said the comment did not represent official policy.

In replying to a question following a speech on family violence at the University of Pittsburgh, I indicated that some video games may tend toward violence in their tone.

"This represented my purely personal judgment and was not based on any accumulated scientific evidence, nor does it represent the official view of the Public Health Service.

"My off-the-cuff comment was not part of any prepared remarks. Nothing in my remarks should be interpreted as implying that video games are per se violent in nature or harmful to children."

Jim Buchan, a spokesman for Koop, declined to comment beyond the written statement.

Buchan said he did not know what Koop said in Pittsburgh and had been unable to get a transcript.

Koop was criticized for the remark by a trade group representing video game and pinball machine manufacturers.

Glenn Braswell, executive director of the Amusement Game Manufacturers Association, wrote the surgeon general demanding evidence to support his statement.

"After stating your views, you publicly agreed that you had no scientific evidence on the effects of video games," Braswell said. "Respectfully, we must remind you that your only official mandate and authority is to develop scientific evidence."

Braswell said many psychologists say the games improve motor skills, develop concentration and introduce millions of kids to computers.

"Your casual comments do violence to the integrity of your high office and do enormous potential damage to major segments of American industry," Braswell said. "We question the credibility of any future research by his office."