

In April 1961 an Australian doctor, William McBride, wrote to Distillers to report his suspicion that thalidomide was the cause of the epidemic of monstrous birth defects suddenly upon the world. Later claiming not to have received McBride's dossier, Distillers's reaction was to pump out a quarter of a million flyers alleging that thalidomide was 'harmless even over a long period of use' and 'completely harmless even for infants'. By November public alarm resulted in the drug being withdrawn from the British market. McBride's and his German counterpart Lenz's evidence for the causal link between thalidomide and birth defects was published in a series of articles in Lancet in December, and in January and February the following year. When thalidomide was ordered withdrawn from the shelf in West Germany in March, Chemie Grünenthal protested that it was unjustified. But business remained brisk. After losing their local markets in West Germany and Britain, both Chemie Grünenthal and Distillers continued shipping thalidomide for administration to pregnant women in other countries, both First and Third World, for several months thereafter: Belgium, Brazil, Italy, Japan and Canada, and Angola, Ghana, Guinea, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Africa, Mozambique, and Nigeria.