

## Sayonara cyanide: Poison land mines should be banned

Tribune Editorial

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They're hollow, spring-loaded land mines, 6-inch-long aluminum cylinders with a lethal dose of sodium cyanide inside. Partially buried, topped with a trigger, covered by cotton impregnated with liquid bait, you'll find them around ranches and farms, on public and private lands, in at least 15 states.

When a coyote or fox or pet dog tugs at the device, it unleashes a lethal dose of poison into their mouths, which mixes with saliva to form a gas that causes convulsions, then paralysis, and finally death.

The government calls them M-44s. They're part of the arsenal employed by the federal Wildlife Services agency in a long-running, futile attempt to control coyotes and other predators that prey on livestock and poultry. But the devices are indiscriminate killers.

They kill coyotes, for sure, 10,630 in 15 states in 2004, including 481 in Utah. They also killed badgers, bobcats, feral dogs, wild hogs, marmots, opossums, raccoons, ravens, skunks and four kinds of foxes -

gray, red, swift and kit. And, while Wildlife Services doesn't provide statistics, they also kill household pets, and sometimes the devices poison pet owners who try to resuscitate them.

And it's only a matter of time until M-44s claim their first human victim. Dennis Slauch of Vernal nearly earned that distinction. While riding his ATV on public lands in Utah in 2003, he attempted to straighten what he thought was a survey stake, and took a blast of sodium cyanide crystals to the face.

Slauch lost his job as a dozer operator for Uintah County. He no longer has the strength to climb into the cab. More than three years after the incident, he still has difficulty breathing, dangerously high blood pressure and a tendency to vomit, almost daily.

He's just another unintended victim of a corporate welfare program for agribusinesses. The government spends about \$10 million a year, and jeopardizes the health and welfare of the public, in order to protect livestock and poultry from predators. A better use of the money would be to compensate ranchers for losses, and teach them to reduce predation by using guard dogs, night penning, fencing and other proven techniques.

Animal rights groups have long advocated outlawing the use of the poisons. And they've found an ally in U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Oregon.

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DeFazio is sponsoring House Resolution 4775, which would outlaw M-44s and other poisons used to control predators. The bill is mired in committee and faces strong opposition from the agriculture lobby. Congress should place public safety above special interests, and boot sodium cyanide off the range.