

Two Killers That Need to Go

An essay by Brooks Fahy, Executive Director of Predator Defense, and Diana Cornelius, Deputy Director of Predator Defense, May 2008

We now we have the opportunity to outlaw two horrific poisons that threaten American wildlife, companion animals, people and our national security. H.R. 4775, the Compound 1080 and M-44 Elimination Act, is now before Congress. Both poisons—sodium fluoroacetate (commonly known as Compound 1080) and sodium cyanide (the toxicant in devices called M-44s) are used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services program to kill native predators that are perceived as threats to livestock. Formerly called Animal Damage Control, Wildlife Services kills some 100,000 native predators each year such as coyotes, mountain lions, wolves, bobcats, foxes, bears, raccoons, and badgers.

Wildlife Services' love affair with poisons began with the program's inception in the early 1900s and extends beyond their use of sodium cyanide and Compound 1080. The agency spends millions of dollars annually to kill over 1.5 million animals under the guise of protecting agriculture and aquaculture. Without a doubt, the most dangerous poisons in their arsenal are Compound 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) and sodium cyanide.

In addition to Wildlife Services' activities, Compound 1080 has been placed on private and public lands by individuals opposing wolf reintroduction; in other cases the motives for its use are unknown.

Historic bill would end the era of predator poisoning

On December 18, 2007, Representative Peter DeFazio, (D-Ore.), introduced the Compound 1080 and M-44 Elimination Act (H.R. 4775) before Congress. The bill would amend the Toxic Substances Control Act to: prohibit the manufacture of Compound 1080 shutting down the only known factory producing this poison worldwide; end processing, possession and distribution of Compound 1080; require the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to inventory, collect and destroy all existing stocks of Compound 1080; and prohibit the federal government's use of the M-44 device (containing sodium cyanide). Following an 18-month grace period, possession of Compound 1080 would be criminally punishable.

Because of the dangers and cruelty associated with these poisons, citizens in California (1998) and Washington State (2000) passed ballot initiatives that ban M-44s and livestock protection collars (LPCs) containing Compound 1080. In 1998, after a tenacious three-year battle spearheaded by Oregon-based Predator Defense, the Wildlife Services

Quick Facts about Compound 1080 and M-44 Poisons

- Compound 1080 and M-44s are extremely dangerous and inhumane.
- Compound 1080 is one of the deadliest poisons on earth and has no antidote.
- Compound 1080 is a potential terrorist threat to water and food supplies.
- These poisons are not selective—they often kill non-target species including endangered species and pets.
- People have been seriously harmed by M-44s and Compound 1080; at least 16 people have died from exposure to Compound 1080.
- Paradoxically, killing coyotes increases their numbers. Read letter by wildlife ecologist Dr. Robert Crabtree on the Coyote page of our website at <http://www.predatordefense.org>.
- Rather than killing predators, ranchers should make more use of good husbandry practices such guard animals, electronic sound and light devices, penning animals at night, lambing in structures, promptly removing any carcasses and fencing appropriately.

program withdrew the agency's registration for use of LPCs in Oregon. In 2005, a bill similar to H.R. 4775 was introduced in Congress by Representative DeFazio. That bill was jettisoned in the Republican-controlled Congress.

Compound 1080—one of the world's deadliest poisons

Compound 1080 is a water-soluble, odorless, colorless and tasteless poison that has no antidote. Deemed "too dangerous for distribution" by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service research scientists in 1946, one teaspoon reportedly can kill up to 100 human adults. Absorbed through the stomach and intestines, open wounds or breaks in the skin, Compound 1080 causes the breakdown of essential cellular processes resulting in cell death and gross organ failure. Death may result from cardiac failure, progressive failure of the central nervous system or respiratory arrest following severe prolonged convulsions.

It is apparent from victims' physical position and condition, including vomited lungs, distended veins, evacuated bowels and bladder, that the animals poisoned by Compound 1080 die a horribly painful death. Deer who have accidentally ingested Compound 1080 have been observed in their agony trying to rip open their own bellies and dogs are driven insane by the excruciating pain inflicted upon them before they succumb to death.

M-44s a menace

M-44 devices are spring-activated ejectors that deliver a deadly dose of sodium cyanide when they are activated. To set an M-44, a small pipe is driven into the ground and then loaded with the ejector containing a capsule with approximately one gram of sodium cyanide. The top of the ejector is wrapped with an absorbent material that has been coated with a substance that attracts canines. When an animal pulls on this material, a spring ejects the sodium cyanide into the animal's mouth and face. The force of the ejector can spray the cyanide granules up to five feet. Case records have shown that a poisoned animal can die within minutes or suffer for as long as eight hours.

With sufficient exposure, sodium cyanide causes dizziness, weakness, labored breathing and nausea, which can be followed by a weak and irregular heartbeat, unconsciousness, convulsions, coma and death. Sodium cyanide is an alkaline and thus irritating and corrosive to body tissues it contacts.

M-44's are primarily used to kill coyotes and, to a lesser extent, red foxes. However, any animal that is attracted to the scent used on a given device may be lured and killed. As a result, a high proportion of animals killed by M-44s are non-target species. M-44s account for 12,000 to 15,000 deaths of wild animals annually. In addition, untold numbers of domestic dogs perish each year because they also are drawn to the scent used on M-44s.

Sodium cyanide is extremely lethal to humans as well. Wildlife Services employees, and anyone else who places or services M-44s, are instructed to carry the antidote, amyl nitrate, to counteract the cyanide should they be sprayed in the face by a M-44. Others, including hikers and children, who stumble across an M-44 have no such protection.

Legal history of Compound 1080 and M-44 use

Prior to 1972, Compound 1080 was spread throughout the West to kill coyotes, wolves, and eagles among other animals viewed by private ranchers as potential threats to livestock. USDA Wildlife Services, then known as Animal Damage Control, was largely responsible for this campaign but Compound 1080 and other poisons also found their way into the hands of ranchers and other individuals. The poison was broadcast in small baits from aircraft and it was used on the ground in "bait stations" (dead horses, cattle, and sheep were killed and laced with the poison to attract and kill predators). Secondary poisoning from this practice was catastrophic in the lasting effects that it had on wolf, eagle and black-footed ferret populations. Many carrion-eating species also took a heavy hit from this indiscriminate poisoning campaign. As a result of this legacy, former President Nixon issued Executive Order 11643 in 1972, which banned the use of poisons to control predators on federal lands. Shortly thereafter the EPA issued PR Notice 72-2 canceling all registered predator control uses of sodium fluoroacetate (Compound 1080), sodium cyanide (the poison used in M-44s), and strychnine.

In 1975, the EPA allowed M-44s to be reintroduced into Wildlife Services' arsenal. In 1981, President Reagan, bowing to the ranching industry, signed Executive Order 12342 revoking President Nixon's ban on the poisons. The Order left the door open for Compound 1080 to be used once again pending the EPA's re-registration of the chemical. In 1985, the EPA granted the U.S. Department of the Interior registration for the use of Compound 1080 in the form of toxic collars (livestock protection collars or LPCs) worn by sheep and goats. Worn around an animal's neck, the collar has two rubber bladders containing a solution of diluted Compound 1080, which is ingested if a predator, such as a coyote or dog, pierces the collar while attempting to take down the animal. The collars are also punctured on thorns and other sharp objects such as barbed wire thereby leaking this deadly poison into the environment. In 1986, the authority for the use of LPC's was transferred to USDA Wildlife Services program.

Poisons unnecessary

Despite the existence of a wide variety of effective alternatives to lethal predator control, such as human presence (shepherds), predator-proof fencing, guard animals, electronic sound and light devices, night penning, shed lambing, and carcass removal, Wildlife Services continues to rely on these poisons that are indiscriminate, dangerous, cruel, and ecologically damaging. Because of the wide array of effective predator control methods available to safeguard livestock, there is simply no reason to take the enormous risks posed by Compound 1080 and M-44s.

A threat to national security

Compound 1080's risk to national security is glaringly obvious. In 2005, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report revealed that the poison (manufactured at the Tull Chemical Company plant in Oxford, Alabama) had been found in Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons laboratory. The report documented Iraq's testing of the poison for potential use in political assassinations.

In April 2003, an article published in The Evening Standard (London) reported that a colonel in the Iraqi internal security service claimed to have damning evidence directly

linking Saddam Hussein to horrific crimes against humanity including poisoning people with Compound 1080. He said: "We would take people to the police station and give them a drink laced with sodium fluoroacetate [Compound 1080]... Then we would let them go. Later, they would die and no one knew it was us."

The potential for bio-terrorism from widespread distribution of Compound 1080 and sodium cyanide (the M-44's toxicant) should not be underestimated. Due to the insidious and extremely dangerous nature of these poisons the FBI has acknowledged that they are "highly toxic pesticides judged most likely to be used by terrorists or for malicious intent." The FBI and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service list Compound 1080 as a substance that may be sought for use as a possible chemical warfare agent in public water supplies. As early as 1999, the U.S. Air Force identified Compound 1080 as a likely biological agent.

Timing is on our side

In recent years, public outrage over the use of Compound 1080 and M-44s has heightened with extensive press coverage about people being poisoned; the CIA report (declassified in 2005) documenting Iraq's testing of Compound 1080; two audits by the USDA's Office of Inspector General that found Wildlife Services' inventory control was sloppy and the program could not account for poison stockpiles; and continuing reports of deaths of non-target animals including wolves, bald eagles and companion animals. In 2007 the fight to outlaw Compound 1080 and M-44s gained momentum. In 2007, a coalition of environmental groups filed a petition with the EPA to ban M-44s and Compound 1080 livestock protection collars. Also in December 2007, the EPA launched a criminal investigation of a 2003 M-44 human poisoning case in Utah. And, in December 2007, Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) introduced a bill to ban Compound 1080 completely and the use of M-44s by any entity of the federal government.

For more information, visit <http://www.predatordefense.org>.