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November 8, 2007

Rep. DeFazio pushes ban of Alabama-made poison exported to NZ

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. - A congressman is trying again to build support for legislation to ban an Alabama-made poison that critics claim is both a deadly threat to wildlife and a potential weapon for terrorists.

Rep. Pete DeFazio, D-Ore., is seeking co-sponsors for a bill to outlaw the manufacturing and possession of Compound 1080, which opponents say is made nowhere but the east Alabama city of Oxford by Tull Chemical Co.

The poison is so lethal a single teaspoonful could kill dozens of people, and there is no known antidote. Previous attempts to outlaw the material failed, but an aide to DeFazio said the new measure stands a better chance of passage.

"He's circulating a bill now and trying to get co-sponsors," Penny Dodge, DeFazio's chief of staff, said Thursday.

The FBI has listed Compound 1080 as a potential tool for terrorists, and the Air Force says it is a likely biological agent, according to a letter DeFazio sent to colleagues seeking support of a ban.

The owner of the Alabama-based Tull Chemical, Charles Wigley, did not immediately return a message seeking comment. He previously has said the poison was safe for humans and wildlife when used properly, and he denied it would be an effective tool for terror.

Opponents have long claimed Compound 1080 kills too indiscriminately when used to control predators like coyotes, and they say terrorists could use the poison as a weapon by introducing it into public water supplies.

"It's gone from being a Western ag issue to a national security issue," said Brooks Fahy of Predator Defense, an organization that opposes production of the material.

Compound 1080 was banned in the United States in 1972 because of its extreme toxicity, but it was re-approved for limited use nine years later to kill predators like coyotes and wolves that threaten sheep and other livestock herds.

The company has said it produces as much as 10,000 pounds of Compound 1080 annually, and most is exported from Alabama to New Zealand, where opponents also are seeking a ban but the government approved its continued use in August.

The DeFazio legislation includes a government buyback of any domestic supplies of the poison, but Dodge said the Congressional Budget Office had yet to compute the potential cost.

The bill would also ban sodium cyanide capsules used to kill predators in the West.

This story can be found on Jacksonville.com at

<http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-apnews/stories/110807/D8SPNC900.shtml>.

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