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DEFAZIO BILL BANS POISON

On Dec. 16, U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) introduced a bill to ban the production, possession and import of sodium fluoroacetate, a poison commonly known as Compound 1080. According to Predator Defense Director Brooks Fahy, the highly concentrated, acute poison has been used in the West for decades to kill coyotes, wolves, eagles, grizzlies and other threatened and endangered animals. Predator Defense, a Eugene-based nonprofit, has been pushing the federal government to ban the compound for years.

But DeFazio's recently introduced bill was presented less as a wildlife protection measure than a counter-terrorism measure. A report to the CIA showed a can of Compound 1080 that coalition troops recovered in Iraq, and the FBI and the U.S. Air Force Service identified the chemical as a substance that terrorists could use to contaminate public water supplies. Even small doses of the chemical can be lethal to humans.

"It started off as a wildlife and community safety issue, and then in the post-9/11 world, [DeFazio] began to realize implications [of Compound 1080] on national security," said DeFazio spokeswoman Kristie Greco. DeFazio is a senior member of the House Homeland Security Committee.

In March 2004, DeFazio requested that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ban the production of Compound 1080. The EPA replied that the chemical was "tightly regulated" and suggested that DeFazio look to the Department of Homeland Security. That department gave DeFazio a classified risk assessment and said it could not prohibit or recommend the prohibition of chemicals.

"It's alarming that the administration doesn't recognize the danger and isn't responding," Greco said. "Everyone should be concerned about the proliferation and use of such a dangerous poison. The congressman felt he needed to take matters to Congress and introduce legislation."

First developed in Germany (possibly for use as a rodenticide or, during World War II, chemical warfare), Compound 1080 is now primarily produced by Tull Chemical Co. in Oxford, Ala. The Nixon administration banned the odorless, tasteless toxin in 1972, but the Reagan administration re-authorized its use for livestock protection collars. When a predator bites the neck of an animal outfitted with such a collar, it ingests Compound 1080 and dies. There is no antidote. Fahy said that although law requires ranchers who use the collars to incinerate the bodies of the dead predators, misuse is widespread and proper disposal of the poisoned carcasses is rare. Former Gov. John Kitzhaber banned the use of Compound 1080 collars in Oregon in 1998.

Fahy said that Compound 1080 is still being used illegally in the Willamette Valley to kill eagles and other sensitive and endangered species. "There's much more 1080 out there than anybody knows about," he said. "I believe it is domestic terrorism when someone goes out and deliberately kills an endangered animal."

For more information, visit predatordefense.org — *Kera Abraham*