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By Michael Milstein

WOLF POISON RAISES ALARMS ABOUT ITS TERRORISM POTENTIAL

Summary: Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., asks the Department of Homeland Security to halt use of Compound 1080

An odorless, colorless and tasteless poison used to kill coyotes and wolves in Western states is under review by the Department of Homeland Security for its potential as a terrorist weapon.

The department's action is in response to a request by Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., a member of Congress' Select Committee on Homeland Security. He urged Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge in an October letter to act immediately to halt manufacture and use of the poison, known as Compound 1080.

The poison, sodium fluoroacetate, has no antidote and is described by the Environmental Protection Agency as "super toxic." One teaspoon could kill as many as 100 adults, DeFazio told Ridge.

The Department of Homeland Security's science and technology team is evaluating the congressman's request and should respond within a few weeks, Valerie Smith, a spokeswoman, said.

Compound 1080 was developed to control rats. But scientists later described it as "so generally and highly toxic that it is too dangerous for general distribution."

It is legal in the United States only when used in a special collar that U.S. government trappers use to protect domestic sheep in some states. Coyotes attacking the sheep puncture the collar and contact the poison, which kills them.

However, federal officials have discovered Compound 1080 being spread illegally in the West. A Fish and Wildlife Service forensic laboratory in Ashland found that at least two and possibly four gray wolves were killed by the poison in Idaho in 2001.

Authorities publicly warned at the time that poison baits could endanger children and pets. They fear hidden stockpiles of the poison may remain from prior to 1972, when President Nixon signed an order

banning its use.

It was later reauthorized for the sheep collars, but former Gov. John Kitzhaber prohibited its use in Oregon in 1998.

The shifting rules have made the poison difficult to trace. It is thought to have been used in the serial poisonings of dozens of zoo animals in Brazil earlier this year.

"There's a black market, and there hasn't been a whole lot of interest in trying to shut it down, which is incredible, considering how dangerous it is," said Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense Institute in Eugene, which asked government officials to outlaw the poison shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The officials never responded, Fahy said.

DeFazio asked the Environmental Protection Agency in March to take steps to ban the poison nationally, but agency officials told him the EPA "is following the lead of the Department of Homeland Security." They also said the EPA is incorporating terrorism concerns into safety training for those using the poison.

The FBI, Air Force and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service have publicly listed Compound 1080 as a chemical agent terrorists could use to poison water supplies. The Canadian agency reported that the poison "could be bought or stolen."

Scientific journals have said that other countries have investigated its use for chemical warfare.

The poison is manufactured by one U.S. company, Tull Chemical Co. in Alabama. Tull has a history of safety violations and does not conform to EPA regulations, DeFazio told Ridge.

"Due to the inherent dangers posed by Tull Chemical Company and the fact that we already have at our disposal a wide array of equally effective predator control methods, there is no reason to take the enormous terrorism and public safety risks that Compound 1080 poses," the congressman wrote.

He urged Ridge to work immediately with the EPA to cancel authority for the poison's use and stop its manufacture and distribution.

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