

GROUP SEEKS FEDERAL BAN OF POISON USED ON COYOTES

By Michael Milstein

The Oregonian

Wednesday, December 5, 2001

Summary: Oregon's Predator Defense Institute fears terrorists could spread the deadly chemical, which has no known antidote

An Oregon conservation group has asked federal homeland security officials to follow Oregon's lead and outlaw a tasteless, colorless and odorless poison used against coyotes in the West so it does not fall into the hands of terrorists.

Gov. John Kitzhaber in 1998 prohibited the use of sodium fluoroacetate, or Compound 1080, in Oregon because of its possible public safety risk. Toxicologists and wildlife advocates say the heightened national concern over terrorism, combined with hints that other countries have investigated the deadly poison as a chemical weapon, now underlines that threat.

"It's a very effective poison in the sense you could give it to a person, and they'd never know they had it," said Dr. Sander Orent, a Boulder, Colo., toxicologist who has studied Compound 1080. "It's really the kind of substance that in my opinion has no practical application."

The Predator Defense Institute of Eugene and the Friends of Animals in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday sent an "emergency request" to Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge asking him to direct the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ban the substance nationwide. The EPA itself earlier turned down such a request, saying it already imposes sufficient controls on the poison.

Compound 1080 can be swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin and is so toxic "one teaspoon can kill up to 100 adult humans and there is no antidote," the groups wrote to Ridge. "The implications for its usage as a chemical weapon are frighteningly obvious."

Similar public safety arguments by the Predator Defense Institute in 1998 led Kitzhaber to cancel a trial Oregon program that fitted collars containing Compound 1080 onto the necks of sheep to kill coyotes attacking them. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., has also pushed for a national ban on the poison.

Other states still allow use of the collars under the supervision of Wildlife Services, the federal agency responsible for controlling predators across the country.

A total of 27 coyotes were killed by the collars in 2000, according to Wildlife Services. Livestock groups say the collar is a precise and effective predator

control method because it kills only coyotes that actually go after sheep.

The fast-acting poison starves the body of oxygen, giving the appearance of cardiac arrest, Orent said.

Compound 1080 is available to licensed users in the United States only in the form of collars. But authorities think stockpiles of the raw poison remain from prior to 1972, when President Nixon signed an executive order banning its use, and say it also can be readily obtained in Mexico.

Last year four endangered gray wolves were found dead in Idaho from illegal Compound 1080 poisoning. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service publicly warned that poison baits could pose a threat to children, pets and wildlife.

Police say the poison also was used to kill more than 60 dogs, cats and birds earlier this year in Grand Junction, Colo.

Although it is illegal to use the poison except in the sheep collar, it is not illegal to possess Compound 1080 if the substance was obtained before Nixon's ban in 1972, said Fish and Wildlife Special Agent Paul Weyland. That loophole can hamper officers trying to track down sources of the poison.

"Nobody knows where it's coming from," said Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense Institute, which works for protection of predators such as coyotes, wolves and mountain lions. "It's already being used in a terrorist form against the environment, and now it's not only an issue of public safety, but also national security."

The journal *Clinical and Diagnostic Veterinary Toxicology* reported that "some countries have investigated (Compound 1080 and related poisons) as a possible chemical warfare agent for addition to water supplies" but provided no further details.

You can reach Michael Milstein at 503-294-7689 or by e-mail at michaelmilstein@news.oregonian.com.