

Statement of Veterinary Support for a Requirement to Use Non-Lead Ammunition for Hunting

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April 12, 2013

We, the undersigned veterinarians, with medical knowledge about lead and its effects on animal health and well-being, recognize the overwhelming scientific evidence about the toxic effects of lead—even at very low exposure levels—on avian and other wildlife species. The veterinary community has seen the grave effects of lead firsthand, while diagnosing and treating animals suffering from lead poisoning. In light of this evidence and professional experience, we support and urge the reduction and eventual elimination of lead released into the environment through the discharge of lead-based ammunition, in order to safeguard animal, human and environmental health.

Lead is toxic to vertebrate physiological systems, including the central and peripheral nervous, renal, cardiovascular, reproductive, immune and hematologic systems, and it is recognized as a carcinogen by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Lead poisoning can cause an inability to fly, starvation, weakness, lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, anemia, blindness, seizures and death.

In addition to the direct negative health impacts of lead on avian and other wildlife species, there are also severe health consequences from secondary poisoning by lead ammunition of other animals, including wild scavenging species such as eagles and other raptors, ravens, turkey vultures, mountain lions—and even dogs and cats—all of whom may ingest lead-poisoned animal carcasses.

Diagnosing and treating lead toxicity in wild birds and mammals is very expensive and time-intensive. Because most lead-poisoned animals are not privately owned, non-profit wildlife rehabilitation centers and charitable organizations bear the primary burden of these costs of care for animals who are brought to them.

Lead-based ammunition is now the greatest largely-unregulated source of lead intentionally discharged into the environment. Many other significant sources of environmental lead, such as leaded gasoline and lead-based paints, were recognized as harmful long ago and have been significantly reduced or eliminated.

In October 2012, a position statement issued by the Association of Avian Veterinarians stated that AAV “recognizes that lead is a potent toxin to wild birds that can have individual-and-population-level effects. Therefore, the AAV advocates the replacement of lead-based sporting ammunition and fishing tackle with non-lead-based alternatives.”

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The American Veterinary Medical Association's *Policy Statement on Toxicoses* reads:

The AVMA supports education, legislation, regulations, research, and other actions that prevent toxicoses in wildlife, domestic animal and human populations.

The AVMA's *Policy Statement on Conservation of Wild Animals* states that the organization:

is concerned about the possible extinction of many animal species. The AVMA should collaborate with naturalists, conservation groups, appropriate governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies to establish and maintain effective actions for the conservation of wild animals in their native habitats.

These AVMA policies provide support for rational advocacy for the elimination of lead ammunition use.

For these reasons, we join with our veterinary colleagues in supporting a common-sense primary prevention policy of requiring that lead ammunition be replaced with non-lead ammunition in order to protect avian and other wildlife species, and domestic and companion animals.

Signed by the following 110 California licensed veterinarians:

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