

Update on the Lead Chemical Action Plan: Lead Ammunition

Lead from ammunition is one of the many sources of this metal covered in the draft Lead Chemical Action Plan (CAP). The CAP is a planning tool to guide statewide efforts to reduce lead exposures in the environment. The goal is to lower the amount of lead people and wildlife are exposed to.

The CAP does not include any recommendations to ban or regulate lead in any type of ammunition beyond current law. This includes all shotgun, rifle and handgun loads. Currently, lead shot is banned for hunting all waterfowl, coot, snipe, and in specific hunting areas (see below). These actions are taken where lead shot is known to be or has the potential to be a significant source of wildlife mortality.

Lead is a Known Poison

We have known for thousands of years that lead is toxic. It is harmful -- even deadly -- to all animals. In humans, children are most at risk. Damage to their developing bodies can be permanent.

A national ban on lead shot for hunting waterfowl was phased in by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service starting in 1986. The reason was large numbers of birds dying after ingesting lead shot. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife extended this ban for all bird hunting and shooting on 15 problem areas, but current restrictions may not include all problem areas.

Lead ammunition has other impacts as well:

- Scavenging animals can be harmed by eating game that is killed with lead ammunition. If particles of lead ammunition are not first removed from game before eating, human health can be harmed, too.
- Lead ammunition can contaminate shooting areas so that these sites are a danger to humans and animals. For example, testing at a popular shooting site at a gravel quarry in Capitol State Forest near Olympia showed lead levels in the soil up to 55,500 parts per million (ppm). The state standard for lead-contaminated soil is 250 ppm. Cleaning up contaminated sites can be costly for private landowners and taxpayers.

WHY IT MATTERS MORE INFORMATION

About Chemical Action Plans

The Washington Department of Ecology is committed to reducing toxic threats. The chemical action plan (CAP) is one of the tools used to carry out this priority work. CAPs deal with substances considered "the worst of the worst" for human health and the environment. Each CAP looks at the sources of exposure from a toxic substance and recommends ways to reduce that threat. Earlier CAPs have dealt with mercury and PBDE flame retardants.

The Lead CAP is now available for public review and comment. For more information, visit: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807053.pdf>

Contact information:

Holly Davies
360-407-7398
hdav461@ecy.wa.gov

Special accommodations:

If you need this publication in an alternate format, call Angie Fritz at 360-407-7393. Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.

Lead Ammunition and the Lead Chemical Action Plan (CAP)

Because of its toxic effects and widespread use, lead ammunition is among the items listed in the CAP. Many other sources are listed, too, such as leaded house paint, car batteries, and toys. The CAP is not a law or a regulation. It suggests ways for reducing sources of a specific toxic chemical, in this case lead. The draft Lead CAP calls for the use of non-toxic alternatives to lead ammunition wherever possible.

Promoting Non-Toxic Alternatives

Non-toxic alternatives to lead ammunition are now available in most places. Ecology favors a voluntary, educational approach to promoting their use.

For example, in 2005 Arizona officials became concerned about the lead poisoning of California condors. Arizona launched a voluntary, collaborative, education-and-outreach partnership with hunting and shooting groups to reduce the use of lead ammunition in condor areas. By 2008, 60 percent of Arizona hunters were using non-lead bullets and an additional 20 percent of hunters continuing to use lead bullets were removing lead-contaminated gut piles. Ecology supports a similar approach in Washington State.

A Cooperative Approach

Over many months, the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) developed the Lead CAP in close cooperation with an advisory group made up of 18 members representing business, industry, health, environmental and sporting interests. (The draft Lead CAP is now open for public review; see side bar, page 1).

Likewise, when the document is finalized, Ecology will work with many agencies, organizations, and groups to carry out its findings. Ecology favors a cooperative approach to work with hunters, shooters, retailers and others in the sporting community to promote the use of non-toxic alternatives to lead ammunition.

For more information about the Lead Chemical Action Plan:

Technical Contact: Holly Davies 360-407-7398 hdav461@ecy.wa.gov

Media Contact: Kathy Davis 360-407-6149 kada461@ecy.wa.gov