

TESTIMONY ON S.B. 580

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Presented to the Senate Committee on
Environment and Natural Resources

Oregon State Capitol, Salem - February 28, 2019

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“In the fall of 1994 I received a call that would change the course of my life. It was a deeply traumatized woman who had just lost her dog to a poison trap and been poisoned herself. Little did I know I was about to become a victim’s advocate for people who lost pets or were injured by one of the deadliest poisons on earth—sodium cyanide.

The EPA classifies sodium cyanide as a Category One poison, meaning most acute toxicity. It is the poison used in M-44 predator control devices, which S.B. 580, the bill before this committee, would ban. The need for a ban becomes obvious when you listen to what really happens when M-44s are used.

M-44s are indiscriminate killers.

They kill countless dogs each year.

They kill countless nontarget wildlife each year, including endangered and threatened species.

They poison people. Last year a Utah man died after an M-44 rendered him permanently disabled in 2003. Cyanide poisoning was listed as a contributing factor in his death. In 2017 an Idaho teen narrowly missed death. It is only a matter of time before an M-44 kills a child.

After three decades of investigating these incidents I can tell you with absolute certainty that placing “cyanide bombs” on the landscape is not worth it!

EVERY PART OF THIS COLLATERAL DAMAGE IS UNACCEPTABLE.

Even worse, far more animal deaths occur each year than are indicated in the official reports released by USDA Wildlife Services. Many M-44 poisonings are simply not reported by their agents. And far too many people have no idea the reason their dog did not come home was because it became yet another victim of an M-44.

I’ve helped so many people deal with the agony of losing their beloved pet and their shock and outrage that cyanide devices were placed by government agents near their backyards, in public places or wild lands, frequently without warning. But no incident hit me harder than the 2017 Pocatello, Idaho case in which a 14-year-old boy named Canyon Mansfield took a walk on a hill behind his house with his dog, Kasey, and accidentally triggered an M-44 when he touched something in the ground that he thought was a sprinkler head. It ejected a powdery cloud. Within a few minutes his dog (and best friend) died a horrifying death in front of him. Canyon was only spared death because the wind was blowing the other direction. But he still required hospitalization and has suffered long-term side effects. His story was featured in the media world-wide.

Every time the death or poisoning of an unintended target is publicized, Wildlife Services says they will take care of the problem by updating their M-44 directives. But their updates have done nothing to prevent countless unnecessary deaths. In the Pocatello case, the M-44 was set illegally. No warning sign was posted, nor were the local sheriff, emergency responders or medical facilities notified of the device or how to respond to an incident.

But discussing this issue of signage is a dead end. Wildlife Services' has long asserted that warning signs will protect the public. Ultimately they can't. Warning signs are only helpful on occasion—when they are seen by those who can read them and posted in all the places people might use when going outside. This is compounded by the fact that whistleblowers have revealed agents often don't post warning signs because they don't want to draw attention to the devices.

So ultimately, you should ignore all this talk of warning signs. Even if they were used “perfectly,” they will not stop a child, dog or wild animal from being killed. They can't read warning signs! And there is virtually no place in the great outdoors where people and animals don't go. And wouldn't you say it is their right to enjoy the great outdoors?

Equally important, science increasingly shows that lethal predator control is unnecessary and counter-productive. For example, poisoning coyotes has not been shown to be effective in reducing predation on livestock and game species; in fact, it may increase it. So the reasons Wildlife Services gives for needing to use M-44 are without merit.

The use of M-44s must end. The devices are deadly, indiscriminate, and unnecessary. As I've said, it is only a matter of time before a child is killed. In fact, we have long feared that would have to happen before a ban takes place.

With S.B. 580, Oregon has the opportunity to prevent such a horror by taking a strong stand on public safety and scientifically sound wildlife policy. Please support this bill to ban M-44s across the state.”

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[Introduction of one-minute trailer for new documentary, “Lethal Control,” which features M-44 victims Predator Defense has worked with over the years. The film brings home the unacceptable legacy (and ongoing travesty) of federal poisoning campaigns and makes a powerful case for a ban on M-44s. The film will be screened for the first time on Saturday, March 2 at the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference in Eugene. The screening will be held from 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m., at the University of Oregon, EMU Redwood Room, and includes a follow-up Q&A with victims and experts.]

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Learn More

- Read our detailed letter to Senate Committee members under Meeting Materials on the S.B. 580 webpage at <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2019R1/Measures/Overview/SB580>. Attachments include a list of featured M-44 incidents, statistics on dog killings, and testimonials from victims and experts.
- Watch our film “EXPOSED: USDA’s Secret War on Wildlife,” which features government whistleblowers and was lauded by Jane Goodall, at www.predatordefense.org/exposed.
- Visit our website at www.predatordefense.org or email brooks@predatordefense.org.