



NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION, INC.
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RELATIONS/STATE AFFAIRS

May 6, 2015

Chair David L. Deen
House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Position: **Oppose**

Re: Opposition to H.460 Traditional Ammunition Ban

Dear Chair Deen and Members of the Committee:

The National Shooting Sports Foundation ("NSSF") is the trade association for America's firearms, ammunition, hunting and recreational shooting sports industry. Its mission is to promote, protect and preserve hunting and the shooting sports. NSSF has a membership of more than 12,500 manufacturers, distributors, firearms retailers, shooting ranges, and sportsmen's organizations. Our manufacturer members make the firearms used by law-abiding Vermont sportsmen, the U.S. military and law enforcement agencies throughout the state. This is to notify you of NSSF's opposition to H.460.

This exhaustive bill would have a detrimental effect on the funding of conservation efforts in the State of Vermont. This regulation will decrease the number of sportsmen in Vermont, which will undoubtedly lead to the loss of our hunting heritage with future generations.

Our industry is proud of its strong presence and economic impact in Vermont. But we are equally mindful of the important role sportsmen play in Vermont's economy. Sportsmen spend close to **\$330 million** each year, generating **\$77 million in taxes** and supporting over **4,900 jobs** all for Vermont. The federal excise tax sportsmen willingly pay on their ammunition and firearms supports wildlife conservation efforts in which Vermont received over **\$4.4 million** in fiscal year 2014. This conservation funding will likely increase in the coming years, but if a lead ban goes into effect for Vermont it will most definitely produce a precipitous decrease.

Our membership includes Vermont-based federally licensed firearms retailers, most of which are small "mom-n-pop" businesses that are the backbone of the state's economy. There are close to 300 federally licensed retailers in the state and that number will surely drop with the introduction of this lead ban. This will of course impact mostly rural communities since these businesses are the ones that bring tax revenue to the small towns and provide the jobs for the citizens. Even on the state level, ignoring the fact that Pittman Robinson funds will dry up, sales tax revenue will decrease right in step with firearms sales.

NSSF opposes the banning of lead ammunition, also known as traditional ammunition. Recently many attempts have been made to scare good people into thinking lead ammunition poses a danger to (1) individuals consuming game that had been harvested using traditional ammunition, and (2) endangered species (i.e. the California Condor) feeding off of gut piles. There is simply no evidence or science to support either fear.

This is why NSSF, along with countless other conservation and sportsmen's groups, supports further scientific research with conclusive results, not hypothesis or consensus, before a measure as drastic as banning lead

ammunition is even considered. The results and research that have already been considered are far from credible and not produced by independent non-biased groups.

This legislation seeks to use lead as a means to end hunting in Vermont. The legislative findings cite studies that have not provided clear or conclusive results, have not been peer reviewed, or have since been discredited by subsequent studies. Statements such as "Given the deleterious impacts of lead ammunition, a requirement of nontoxic ammunition should be implemented..." The problem with this statement is that traditional ammunition has never been proven to have a species population level impact in wildlife. Lead is a naturally occurring element that is readily accessible to wildlife and simply blaming ammunition is irresponsible and naïve.

For more than a century, hundreds of millions of Americans have safely consumed game harvested using traditional hunting ammunition and have reloaded their own ammunition at home without any health concerns.

In the past we have seen situations where "contaminated" venison was removed from food pantries and food banks used to feed the homeless because of an overreaction to a politically motivated individual. Unfortunately, it was later revealed that this situation was magnified by anti-hunting groups whose sole objective was to create a highly publicized event to damage hunting.

There has been absolutely no peer-reviewed scientific evidence to support the unfortunate and unnecessary overreaction by North Dakota and Minnesota officials to take nourishing, high-protein food out of the mouths of the needy by requiring food banks to discard tons of venison donated by hunters because of an unwarranted fear of lead poisoning.

To help put in perspective the outlandish claims concerning the safety of game harvested using traditional ammunition, consider this statement from the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) – a state agency that has conducted an extensive panel of blood-lead testing for more than fifteen years: "IDPH maintains that if lead in venison were a serious health risk, it would likely have surfaced within extensive blood lead testing since 1992 with 500,000 youth under 6 and 25,000 adults having been screened." It has not.

Game harvested with traditional ammunition has been safely consumed by humans for hundreds of years and is a source of healthy, low-fat food. Naturally, hunters would be concerned about any claim that game harvested with traditional ammunition posed a health risk, even when the claim is unwarranted, as occurred in North Dakota. Fortunately, the release of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study of blood lead levels in North Dakota hunters validated what hunters have always known: ***consuming game harvested with traditional ammunition containing lead does not pose a human health risk.***

It's important that all hunters and their families know this and other key facts from the study:

- The average lead level of the hunters tested was actually lower than the blood lead level of the average American, including non-hunters.
- The average lead level of children in the study was only .88 micrograms per deciliter of blood; the CDC's level of concern for lead in children is 5 -- more than 5 times the amount found!
- The difference between participants who ate wild game harvested with traditional ammunition and non-hunters was only .3 micrograms -- a clinically insignificant number.

The California Condor and Lead Ammunition

In California, anti-hunting groups and radical environmentalists waged a strong lobbying campaign to ban lead ammunition, citing allegations that lead is poisoning the California Condor.

Some condors have shown elevated levels of lead, a naturally occurring element found in batteries, light bulbs, paint chips and many other items found in condor nests; incidentally, these lead-based items have never been tested as a possible source of elevated lead levels in condors. This is especially noteworthy when one considers that there

is no credible scientific evidence to support the notion that higher lead levels in condors are due to the ingestion of ammunition fragments.

While the Executive Committee of the Condor Recovery Team joined with the NSSF and numerous conservation and sportsmen's groups to support the adoption of science-based voluntary, non-ban measures -- measures that would have served to interrupt the potential pathways for the ingestion of lead bullet fragments by condors -- the legislature chose to disregard science and the opinions of experts by signing into law legislation banning lead ammunition for hunting in the Golden State. This lead ammunition ban went into effect on July 1, 2008.

The ban on traditional ammunition will do nothing to help the California Condor. It will however hurt many Californians and the economy within the state. There have already been preliminary findings that show hunting licenses have seen a tremendous decrease since the implementation of the lead ban.

A survey conducted by the Responsive Management Company confirmed the results of an earlier survey research demonstrating that California hunters strongly support a program of voluntary measures, not a lead ammunition ban, which would help avoid the ingestion of lead bullet fragments by condors.

In summary, the survey results showed the following:

- The majority (68 percent) of California hunters oppose a mandatory ban on the use of lead ammunition. Most are in strong opposition to such a ban.
- Approximately 25 percent of hunters would either quit game hunting or hunt less in California if a ban was adopted (15 percent would hunt in another state, 8 percent would hunt less frequently, and 2 percent would quit hunting altogether).
- Most hunters (73 percent) indicated that they would be likely to participate in some or all of the voluntary measures that would help prevent condor exposure to lead from ammunition.

At present, non-lead big game hunting ammunition is a very limited source technology, with hunters having finite availability of non-lead ammunition suitable for taking big game. Furthermore, the long term toxicity of substitute metals in ammunition has not yet been tested and many hunters would not be able to find non-lead ammunition for their own particular big game rifle due to the scarcity of alternative metals. Additionally, would-be substituted metals are more expensive than conventional ammunition thereby further discouraging lawful hunting.

Conclusion

Despite there being no scientific evidence to support the hypothesis that lead ammunition is endangering the health of individuals, the California Condor or any other wildlife, anti-hunting interest groups are continuing to press state legislatures and departments around the country to support a ban on traditional ammunition. These politically driven groups understand that while an outright ban on hunting would be nearly impossible to achieve, dismantling the culture of hunting one step at a time is a substitute goal. Banning lead ammunition is a first step -- a step that is literally taking the food out of the mouths of the hungry, unnecessarily, to advance a political agenda. Much more research on the actual claims of toxicity in humans must be done prior to even considering abolishing the use of lead in ammunition.

Sincerely,



Jake McGuigan
Director of State Affairs