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# The Oregonian

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## Banning lead bullets is necessary

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By Lori Ann Burd

Whether in ammunition, paint or gasoline, lead is highly toxic, particularly for children, and causes a range of disabling health problems and even death at extremely low exposure rates. Yet, removing it from our homes, cars and environment has been a slow process due to industry push-back. In the early 20th century, lead gasoline was causing workers manufacturing it to go insane. But before it was banned in the early 1970s, the industry fought off regulation, first by falsely asserting that lead was not a health risk, then by falsely claiming that, although they had added lead to gasoline, they couldn't remove it. Similarly, companies producing lead-based house paints fought hard against the science-based push to stop using highly toxic paints in our homes.

Now we're seeing the same pushback in response to efforts to eliminate the use of lead bullets, which research shows are endangering human health and poisoning millions of birds and other animals every year. This effort to distort, or ignore, well-documented facts about the dangers of lead ammunition was reflected in a recent op-ed published in The Oregonian/OregonLive.

But the facts are clear.

Leading scientists agree that spent lead from lead shot and bullet fragments is likely the largest remaining source of lead knowingly added to the environment in the United States, where every year an estimated 3,000 tons of lead are shot into the environment by hunters and another 80,000 tons are released at shooting ranges.

Fragments of lead bullets often remain in game shot in the wild, and spent lead shotgun pellets can litter popular hunting areas at dangerous densities of more than 400,000 pellets per acre. People eating meat from animals hunted with lead bullets can also ingest dangerous amounts of lead. Yet gun groups have launched a barrage of misleading claims about non-lead ammunition.

Again, the facts are clear: Hunters have been successfully hunting with copper rounds in 14 California counties for seven years since non-lead hunting ammunition requirements went into effect to protect endangered California condors from lead poisoning. Game tag sales and hunter-generated revenues for conservation actually went up since these regulations were passed. All hunting in California will be lead-free by 2019.

There are many affordable, nontoxic alternatives to lead bullets available in all 50 states. More than a dozen manufacturers now market hundreds of varieties and calibers of nonlead bullets and shot made of steel, copper and alloys of other metals, with satisfactory-to-superior ballistics. Researchers have found no major difference in the retail price of equivalent lead-free and lead-core ammunition for most popular calibers.

Not surprisingly, some of the staunchest supporters of efforts to get rid of lead ammo are hunters. They understand that continuing to pollute the environment with lead bullets has nothing to do with traditional American conservation and hunting values.

Now is the time to face the facts and put lead ammo behind us forever.