



October, 2010

Dear Friend,

***IMPORTANT UPDATE:*** *In August, I asked you to support our campaign to stop the University of Guelph's Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) killing animals – hundreds every year – in its surgical training programs, a practice leading veterinary colleges around the world and all other Canadian veterinary colleges had already ended.*

*We've won! Thanks to people like you. Thanks to their advocacy. Thanks to their generous contributions. Because of our campaign the OVC will no longer kill animals to teach students surgery.*

*The decision came within days of letters from Animal Alliance / Environment Voters' supporters arriving on the desk of the university's Chancellor, Senator Pamela Wallin.*

*From all of us here at AA/EV, thank you so much for all you've done for the animals, for helping save so many lives.*

And now another group of animals, and a whole ecosystem, need your help.

In 1999, thanks, as always, to the generous contributions and tireless advocacy of people like you, we successfully campaigned and pressured the British Columbia government to ban the poison Compound 1080. The ban has remained in effect to this day, sparing untold numbers of wolves and other animals agonizing and senseless deaths.

The victory wasn't ours alone. We made common cause with provincial animal and environmental protection organizations and caring individuals.

With your help, we want to apply the strategies and tactics we developed in our successful B.C. campaign to end the use of not only Compound 1080, but also strychnine in the last two provinces that use them, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Before I tell you about this new campaign and how your help is key to making it a success, let me first explain what Compound 1080 and strychnine are, and why they must be banned to protect animals and the environment.

Compound 1080 (sodium monofluoroacetate) and strychnine are deadly poisons that kill animals cruelly and indiscriminately, all the while wreaking havoc on the environment.

Compound 1080 is so deadly that one teaspoonful will kill 100 people; so deadly that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service lists it as a chemical agent that terrorists could use to poison water supplies; so deadly there is no antidote.

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Compound 1080 is so deadly that in Canada only specially trained government officials are permitted to use it. Not so with strychnine. It can be used in some forms by ordinary farmers and ranchers, assuring its misuse and abuse.

The poisons are used to kill a range of animals vilified as “pests” by farmers and ranchers, including northern pocket gophers, Richardson’s ground squirrels, pigeons, coyotes, wolves, and black bears.

However, even when used according to regulations, they also kill “non-target” species, many that are protected, threatened, or endangered.

Death by Compound 1080 and strychnine is slow, agonizing, cruel. What follows is an excerpt from a letter written by Brooke and Cliff Everest of Bozeman, Montana. Their dog Bea, an American Brittany, was accidentally poisoned by Compound 1080 when she licked a sheep carcass laced with the poison.

*“...we were totally mystified as Bea went from a dog calmly lying around camp through a progression of ever more bewildering symptoms. After seeing her heaving and trying to vomit, she suddenly jumped into Brooke’s lap with a scream of pure terror. She then charged around camp, jumping in and out of the raft, crying and yelping in a frenzy of fright and pain. Our efforts to calm her had no effect. She ran a high speed circuit around camp, accidentally slamming into our friend sitting in a chair, then launched off the raft into the river and started swimming for the opposite shore (totally uncharacteristic for this dog). Our frantic calls were ignored as the current carried her downstream. She finally turned back towards our side of the river, but when she reached shore, she raced away from us. We found her collapsed under a bush in violent convulsions with a frightening stare, pounding heart, gagging and gulping for air. After 15 more minutes of this agony, Bea died and her body immediately became very rigid.”*

As part of our campaign we are sending DVDs to all Alberta, Saskatchewan and federal legislators. The DVD, “*Political Poison*”, contains videos of dogs and other animals dying from both Compound 1080 and strychnine poisoning. The deaths, as you can imagine, are extremely disturbing. They are heart wrenching.

It is crucial, I believe, that our legislators see and hear (if they have the courage) the suffering and cruelty that their policies inflict on wildlife.

I don’t recommend that *you* watch the videos yourself, but should you find it necessary to convince others skeptical of the need to ban Compound 1080 and strychnine ask them to visit our website at [www.animalalliance.ca](http://www.animalalliance.ca) and click on “*Political Poison*”.

*We chose “Political Poison” as the title because these poisons, in fact, do not solve the “pest control” problems that ranchers and farmers complain about. They solve politicians’ problems: voters demanding that something be done. Spreading Compound 1080 and strychnine gives the illusion that politicians are “doing something”. It doesn’t*

*matter that what they are doing is useless, cruel, and harms the environment. Poisoning animals with Compound 1080 and strychnine isn't about truly helping ranchers and farmers; it's about politicians helping themselves stay elected.*

The cruelty of Compound 1080 and strychnine is reason enough to ban them. But, I'm sure it will be no surprise to you to learn that the Canadian legislation regulating these poisons, the *Pest Control Products Act* ("Act") is silent about cruelty. It seems that when killing animals deemed "pests" under Canadian laws, the more extreme the cruelty the better.

However, what the Act is not silent about – and what regulators and politicians have been deaf to so far – is its legal mandate and primary objective which includes "to prevent unacceptable risks to ...the environment from the use of pest control products".

There's more. "In furtherance of the primary objective" the Act requires the government to "support sustainable development designed to enable the needs of the present to be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

And lastly, the Act demands the government "ensure that only pest control products that are determined to be of acceptable value are approved for use in Canada."

What is "acceptable value" according to the Act? "Value... means the product's actual or potential contribution to pest management".

It's under these provisions – provisions that are the legal foundation of the Act – that we can pressure the government, with your support, to ban Compound 1080 and strychnine in Canada. The form that our pressure will take will depend on how the officials who now administer the Act at the Pest Management Regulatory Agency respond to the issues we'll be raising.

Let me explain what those issues will be.

First, according to the Act, to register a poison to be used in Canada the registrants must show that it has "acceptable value". In plainer words, they must prove that the poison, in fact, deals effectively with the "pest control problem" for which it is intended.

This has not been done for either Compound 1080 or strychnine. We know that both poisons kill – and kill horribly – the animals whom farmers, ranchers, and others want cold stone dead in the greatest numbers possible.

But, after decades of using these chemicals in Canada and around the world, and the loss of the lives of many millions of animals, the pest control problems as perceived by farmers and ranchers still persist. Clearly, these poisons despite their carnage and cruelty don't solve the farmers' and ranchers' pest control problems.

What's even more bizarre than continuing to use products that don't work is that no evidence has ever been presented to quantify the actual financial extent of the damage that the "pests" so hated by farmers and ranchers are supposed to be causing.

We have tales of exaggerated woe, but that's all. And, we have outrage and vilification – indeed, gut level hatred – of Richardson's ground squirrels, coyotes, and other animals, but no accurate evidence of the extent of the alleged damage to agricultural equipment or crops or loss of productivity.

As stated in the Pest Management Regulatory Agency's documents approving the use of strychnine, "Measures of the economic costs of infestations and the corresponding treatment have never been established for Richardson's ground squirrels and need to be researched." The same is true for other so-called "pests". Shouldn't we actually know the extent of a problem before implementing such cruel and environmentally destructive measures as poisoning tens of thousands of animals?

If we don't know what the "economic costs of infestations and the corresponding treatment" are, can the government determine "acceptable value"? The answer is "No". It can't and therefore, according to the Act, it should not register the poison for use. That's the law.

*I don't say "that's the law" lightly. Given the current government's intransigence and abhorrence of science and facts when it comes to environmental and animal protection issue, and its single-minded kowtowing to its political base in rural, western Canada, it's inevitable that we'll have to take the federal government to court to have Compound 1080 and strychnine banned.*

The second issue we'll be presenting to federal bureaucrats, the Minister of Health, and in the end to a federal judge for banning Compound 1080 and strychnine concerns the mandate that the Act imposes on the government to "support sustainable development".

The government does not know, nor do those in Alberta and Saskatchewan applying to use Compound 1080 and strychnine, the extent of the environmental damage the poisons cause. We know that when the poisons are used, they always kill "non-target species".

Let me again quote the PMRA's own findings.

*"...this study clearly indicate[s] that primary poisoning of non-target birds does occur when using strychnine baits for ground squirrel control, which can also result in a considerable potential for secondary poisonings."*

According to the Vancouver-based Western Canada Wilderness Committee,

*"Two endangered species, the swift fox and the burrowing owl, not only eat Richardson's ground squirrels, but also use abandoned burrows for nests and lairs."*

What's worse is that when species like Richardson's ground squirrels are killed off, sometimes the coyotes and wolves who eat them are driven by hunger to prey on livestock. Pest control measures that rely on poisons increase, not decrease, the problems that farmers and ranchers are hoping to solve.

This vicious cycle of killing off more and more prey and predators deemed "pests" spirals downward into greater and greater environmental destruction. This is the definition of "unsustainable" not "sustainable development". It is an affront to the letter and spirit of the Act.

Our last and most compelling and persuasive “sustainable development” argument is that Richardson’s ground squirrels, coyotes, wolves, bears, and the other animals who are targets for Compound 1080 or strychnine play crucial roles in the ecosystem. This fact is never taken into account by the PMRA or the government. Consequently, they cannot be adhering to the Act which requires them to “support sustainable development”. The government cannot “support sustainable development” when it willfully ignores the crucial role species play in the eco-system and poisons them with what are best described as environmental weapons of mass destruction.

Let me reference again the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, a group we worked with on the B.C. Compound 1080 ban.

*Another important role Richardson’s ground squirrels play in the prairie ecosystem is maintaining soil and vegetation. Their burrows aid the flow of water, nutrients and oxygen needed for soil micro-organisms and plant roots to flourish. Bumblebees, vital pollinators of native plants, use abandoned burrows as nest sites. Richardson’s ground squirrels also eat grasshoppers and other insects, helping to keep their numbers in check. Richardson’s ground squirrels are a lynchpin of prairie ecosystems.*

Our immediate targets in this campaign to permanently ban Compound 1080 and strychnine are Alberta’s and Saskatchewan’s pending requests to the PMRA for approval to use the poisons. A victory here will have ramifications in other provinces, like Ontario, where too frequently municipal politicians – as irresponsible and self-serving as their provincial and federal colleagues – call for their use.

We need your immediate help – your advocacy and your generous financial support – on two key elements of the campaign.

First we need you to use the special flyer and campaign envelope included with this letter to send the Minister of Health, the Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, who is responsible for approving the use of Compound 1080 and strychnine, your whole-hearted endorsement of our campaign and your personal appeal to her to ban the poisons.

I don’t expect the Minister to instantly “see the light” and grant your and my requests for a ban (Ministers rarely do). What will happen, however, is that because of your message to her – and the legal merits of our concerns about the regulatory process – the Minister will give this issue priority. She will demand internal reviews of the implementation of the Act. They will show that, yes, the government is breaching the law. Your message to the Minister is a vital first campaign step.

The second element of the campaign that needs your support is the legal challenge. There is no doubt in my mind that the present government will not “do the right thing” or even obey the law unless it is forced to do so by a court.

It will take considerable funds to challenge the government in federal court. Based on our past court challenges, I estimate about \$100,000 over a two year period. For this reason, I implore you to make the most generous contribution to this campaign that you can.

As the campaign progresses, we'll also need your support for its public and organizational outreach elements. Using print and video materials distributed on the Internet and through magazines, newspapers, and electronic media we'll work to raise public and press awareness of the animal cruelty and environmental destruction caused by Compound 1080 and strychnine, and the self-serving role played by politicians in their use.

We'll also reach out for the support of other organizations, as we did in the winning B.C. campaign. They will need comprehensive background information on the poisons, and they'll need communications materials to raise the issue with their own supporters, local politicians, and local press.

Doing all of this – particularly doing it well and effectively – depends on your support. Every animal's life Animal Alliance / Environment Voters has saved, every ecosystem it has helped protect happened because of the financial support and courageous advocacy of people like you. People who not only care passionately about animals and the environment, but, more importantly, will take and support concrete actions to protect and save them.

Thank you for all you've done.



Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Liz White". The signature is fluid and includes a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Liz White  
*Director*

P.S. A closing plea. This campaign will likely take two or three years, as did the B.C. campaign. Please, allow me to ask you to reconsider becoming a monthly contributor. I hope you will. Regular monthly contributions give us the financial security to consider and plan longer term campaigns, like this federal ban on Compound 1080 and strychnine. Often – in fact usually – it is the long-term campaigns that produce the long-term protections needed by animals and the environment.