

Plans announced to phase out lead ammunition in bid to protect wildlife

- Government sets out the restriction work to be carried out in the first year of UK REACH, the UK's new chemical regime
- Evidence shows lead ammunition harms the environment, wildlife and people
- Consultation will seek public's views on restriction proposals

Lead ammunition could be phased out under government plans to help protect wildlife and nature, Environment Minister Rebecca Pow announced today [23 March].

A large volume of lead ammunition is discharged every year over the countryside, causing harm to the environment, wildlife and people. The government is now considering a ban under the UK's new chemical regulation system – [UK REACH](#)– and has requested an official review of the evidence to begin today with a public consultation in due course.

Research by the [Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust](#) shows that between 50,000 to 100,000 wildfowl die in the UK each year due ingesting lead from used pellets. Despite being highly toxic, wildfowl often mistake the pellets for food. A further 200,000 to 400,000 birds suffer welfare or health impacts, and animals that predate on wildfowl can also suffer.

Lead ammunition can also find its way into the wider environment and the food chain, posing a risk to people if they eat contaminated game birds. Studies have also found that lead poisoning caused lowered immune systems in wild birds, potentially aiding the spread of diseases such as avian influenza (bird flu).

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Addressing the impacts of lead ammunition will mark a significant step forward in helping to protect wildlife, people, and the environment.

This is a welcome development for our new chemicals framework, and will help ensure a sustainable relationship between shooting and conservation.

The announcement today has been welcomed by environmental organisations.

Dr Julia Newth, Ecosystem Health & Social Dimensions Manager at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), said:

Conservationists, including WWT, shooting organisations and game

meat retailers have recognised the toxic risks from lead ammunition to people and the environment. Regulation of its use in all shooting, wherever this may happen, is very much needed as soon as possible to protect human and animal health and to enable us to move towards a greener and safer future.

Shooting organisations are also supportive of transitioning away from the use of lead ammunition and are working with government to bring this about.

The Environment Agency, together with the Health and Safety Executive, will now start a two-year process to review the evidence, conduct a public consultation and propose options for restrictions.

Now we have left the EU we are able to make our own laws. UK REACH allows decisions to be made on the regulation of chemicals based on the best available scientific evidence, ensuring chemicals remain safely used and managed.

Notes to editors:

- The use of lead ammunition in England is restricted by the Environmental Protection (Restriction on the use of Lead Ammunition) (England) Regulations 1999. (Similar existing regulations apply in Wales with different definitions adopted in Scotland and Northern Ireland), These Regulations prohibit the use of lead ammunition on all foreshores in England, in or over specified SSSIs (predominately wetlands) and for the shooting of all ducks and geese, coot and moorhen. The plans announced today will consider phasing out the use of lead ammunition across all environments across England, Scotland and Wales.
- The Government is also initiating a restriction on substances with certain hazards in tattoo inks and permanent make-up.