

**Title:**

Health Risks from Lead-Based Ammunition in the Environment - A Consensus Statement of Scientists

**Author:**

[Bellinger, David C.](#)  
[Bradman, Asa](#)  
[Burger, Joanna](#)  
[Cade, Tom J.](#)  
[Cory-Slechta, Deborah A.](#)  
[Doak, Daniel](#)  
[Finkelstein, Myra](#)  
[Flegal, A. Russell](#)  
[Fry, Michael](#)  
[Green, Rhys E.](#)  
[Hu, Howard](#)  
[Jacobs, David E.](#)  
[Johnson, Christine](#)  
[Kelly, Terra](#)  
[Kosnett, Michael](#)  
[Landrigan, Philip J.](#)  
[Lanphear, Bruce](#)  
[Mielke, Howard W.](#)  
[Newton, Ian](#)  
[Pokras, Mark A.](#)  
[Poppenga, Robert H.](#)  
[Redig, Patrick T.](#)  
[Rideout, Bruce A.](#)  
[Risebrough, Robert W.](#)  
[Scheuhammer, Tony](#)  
[Silbergeld, Ellen](#)  
[Smith, Donald R.](#)  
[Strupp, Barbara](#)  
[Thomas, Vernon G.](#)  
[Wright, Robert](#)

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## Health Risks from Lead-Based Ammunition in the Environment

### A Consensus Statement of Scientists

March 22, 2013

*We, the undersigned, with scientific expertise in lead and environmental health, endorse the overwhelming scientific evidence on the toxic effects of lead on human and wildlife health. In light of this evidence, we support the reduction and eventual elimination of lead released to the environment through the discharge of lead-based ammunition, in order to protect human and environmental health.*

- 1) Lead is one of the most well-studied of all anthropogenic toxins and there is overwhelming scientific evidence that demonstrates:
  - a) Lead is toxic to multiple physiological systems in vertebrate organisms, including the central and peripheral nervous, renal, cardiovascular, reproductive, immune, and hematologic systems. Lead is also potentially carcinogenic; lead is officially recognized as a carcinogen and reproductive toxin in California, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the National Toxicology Program, and the US Environmental Protection Agency have identified lead as likely to be carcinogenic to humans.
  - b) There is no level of lead exposure to children known to be without deleterious effects (CDC, 2012). Exposure in childhood to even slightly elevated levels of lead produce lasting neurological deficits in intelligence and behavior.
  - c) Lead is also known to be toxic across different vertebrate organisms, including mammalian and avian species.
- 2) Lead-based ammunition is likely the greatest, largely unregulated source of lead knowingly discharged into the environment in the United States. In contrast, other significant sources of lead in the environment, such as leaded gasoline, lead-based paint, and lead-based solder, are recognized as harmful and have been significantly reduced or eliminated over the past 50 years.
  - a) Lead-based ammunition production is the second largest annual use of lead in the United States, accounting for over 60,000 metric tons consumed in 2012, second only to the consumption of lead in the manufacture of storage batteries (USGS, 2013).
  - b) The release of toxic lead into the environment via the discharge of lead-based ammunition is largely unregulated. Other major categories of lead consumption, such as leaded batteries and sheet lead/lead pipes, are regulated in their environmental discharge/disposal.
- 3) The discharge of lead-based ammunition and accumulation of spent lead-based ammunition in the environment poses significant health risks to humans and wildlife. The best available scientific evidence demonstrates:
  - a) The discharge of lead-based ammunition substantially increases environmental lead levels, especially in areas of concentrated shooting activity (USEPA ISA for Lead draft report, 2012).
  - b) The discharge of lead-based ammunition is known to pose risks of elevated lead exposure to gun users (NRC, 2012).
  - c) Lead-based bullets used to shoot wildlife can fragment into hundreds of small pieces, with a large proportion being sufficiently small to be easily ingested by scavenging animals or incorporated into processed meat for human consumption (Pauli and Burkirk, 2007; Hunt *et al.*, 2009; Knott *et al.*, 2010).

- d) Lead-based ammunition is a significant source of lead exposure in humans that ingest wild game (Hanning *et al.*, 2003; Levesque *et al.*, 2003; Johansen *et al.*, 2006; Tsuji *et al.*, 2008), and hunters consuming meat shot with lead-based ammunition have been shown to have lead pellets/fragments in their gastrointestinal tract (Carey, 1977; Reddy, 1985).
- e) Lead poisoning from ingestion of spent lead-based ammunition fragments poses a serious and significant threat to California wildlife.
  - i. Spent lead-based ammunition is the principal source of lead exposure to the endangered California condor, and lead poisoning in condors is preventing their successful recovery in the wild (Church *et al.*, 2006; Woods *et al.*, 2007; Green *et al.*, 2008; Parish *et al.*, 2009; Rideout *et al.*, 2012; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2012).
  - ii. Many other wild scavenging species, such as golden eagles, bald eagles, ravens, turkey vultures, and pumas are known to be exposed to and affected by lead (Wayland and Bollinger, 1999; Clark and Scheuhammer, 2003; Fisher *et al.*, 2006; Craighead and Bedrosian, 2008; Stauber *et al.*, 2010; Kelly and Johnson, 2011; Burco *et al.*, 2012).

Based on overwhelming evidence for the toxic effects of lead in humans and wildlife, even at very low exposure levels, convincing data that the discharge of lead-based ammunition into the environment poses significant risks of lead exposure to humans and wildlife, and the availability of non-lead alternative products for hunting (Thomas, 2013), we support reducing and eventually eliminating the introduction of lead into the environment from lead-based ammunition.

Signed,

**David C. Bellinger, PhD, MSc**  
Professor  
Neurology and Environmental Health  
Harvard Medical School  
Harvard School of Public Health  
Boston, MA 02115

**Deborah A. Cory-Slechta, PhD**  
Professor of Environmental Medicine and of  
Pediatrics  
University of Rochester School of Medicine  
Box EHSC  
Rochester, NY 14642

**Asa Bradman, PhD, MS**  
Center for Environmental Research and  
Children's Health (CERCH)  
School of Public Health  
University of California, Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA 94720

**Daniel Doak, PhD**  
Professor and Colorado Chair in  
Environmental Studies  
Environmental Studies Program  
University of Colorado Boulder  
Boulder, CO 80309

**Joanna Burger, PhD**  
Distinguished Professor of Biology  
604 Allison Road  
Rutgers University  
Piscataway, NJ 08854

**Myra Finkelstein, PhD**  
Adjunct Assistant Professor  
Microbiology and Environmental Toxicology  
University of California  
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

**Tom J. Cade, PhD**  
Professor Emeritus of Zoology  
Department of Ecology and Evolutionary  
Biology, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY  
6484 Hollilynn Dr.  
Boise, ID 83709

**A. Russell Flegal, PhD**  
Professor  
Department of Earth & Planetary Sciences  
University of California, Santa Cruz  
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

**Michael Fry, PhD**

Research Physiologist (retired)  
Department of Avian Sciences  
University of California, Davis  
Davis, CA 95616

**Rhys E. Green, PhD**

Professor of Conservation Science  
University of Cambridge  
Department of Zoology  
Downing Street  
Cambridge CB2 3EJ  
United Kingdom

**Howard Hu, MD, MPH, ScD**

Director & Professor  
Dalla Lana School of Public Health  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, ON M5T 3M7  
Canada

**David E. Jacobs, PhD, CIH**

Research Director, National Center for  
Healthy Housing  
Adjunct Associate Professor, University of  
Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health  
Washington DC 20016

**Christine Johnson, DVM, PhD**

Associate Professor of Ecosystem Health  
and Epidemiology  
School of Veterinary Medicine, Wildlife  
Health Center  
University of California, Davis  
Davis, CA 95616

**Terra Kelly, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACZM**

Wildlife Veterinarian and Epidemiologist  
School of Veterinary Medicine, Wildlife  
Health Center  
University of California, Davis  
Davis, CA 95616

**Michael Kosnett, MD, MPH**

Associate Clinical Professor  
Division of Clinical Pharmacology &  
Toxicology  
Department of Medicine, University of  
Colorado School of Medicine  
Department of Environmental and  
Occupational Health,  
Colorado School of Public Health  
Aurora, CO 80045

**Philip J. Landrigan, MD, MSc**

Dean for Global Health  
Ethel H. Wise Professor and Chairman  
Department of Preventive Medicine  
Professor of Pediatrics  
Director, Children's Environmental  
Health Center  
Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
New York, NY 10029

**Bruce Lanphear, MD, MPH**

Clinician Scientist, Child & Family Research  
Institute  
BC Children's Hospital Professor  
Simon Fraser University  
Vancouver, BC V6H 3N1  
Canada

**Howard W. Mielke, PhD**

Professor  
Department of Pharmacology  
Tulane University School of Medicine  
New Orleans, LA 70112

**Ian Newton, D.Sc, OBE, FRS, FRSE**

Emeritus Fellow,  
Centre for Ecology & Hydrology  
Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford  
Wallingford, Oxon OX10 8BB  
United Kingdom

**Mark A. Pokras, DVM**

Associate Professor  
Wildlife Clinic & Center for Conservation  
Medicine Tufts University  
Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine  
N. Grafton, MA 01536

**Robert H. Poppenga, DVM, PhD, DABVT**  
CAHFS Toxicology Laboratory  
School of Veterinary Medicine  
University of California  
West Health Sciences Drive  
Davis, CA 95616

**Patrick T. Redig, DVM, PhD**  
Professor of Avian Medicine & Surgery  
Founder & Director Emeritus of The Raptor  
Center  
University of Minnesota  
St. Paul, MN 55108

**Bruce A. Rideout, DVM, PhD**  
Wildlife Disease Laboratories  
Institute for Conservation Research  
San Diego Zoo Global  
PO Box 120551  
San Diego, CA 92112

**Robert W. Risebrough, PhD**  
Research Ecologist (retired)  
University of California, Berkeley and Santa  
Cruz  
Executive Director, Bodega Bay Institute  
2711 Piedmont Avenue  
Berkeley, CA 94705

**Tony Scheuhammer, PhD**  
Emeritus Scientist  
National Wildlife Research Centre  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H3  
Canada

**Ellen Silbergeld, PhD**  
Professor  
Department of Environmental Health  
Sciences  
Department of Epidemiology  
Department of Health Policy and  
Management  
Johns Hopkins University  
Baltimore, MD 21205

**Donald R. Smith, PhD**  
Professor  
Microbiology and Environmental Toxicology  
University of California  
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

**Barbara Strupp, PhD**  
Professor  
Division of Nutritional Sciences  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853

**Vernon G. Thomas, BA, MA (Oxon), MSc,  
PhD**  
Professor Emeritus  
Department of Integrative Biology  
College of Biological Science  
University of Guelph,  
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1  
Canada

**Robert Wright, MD, MPH**  
Professor of Pediatrics  
Department of Preventive Medicine  
Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
New York, NY 10029

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