



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 27, 2024

BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL 983 - FIRST READER

SHORT TITLE: HUNTING - LEAD AND LEAD-BASED AMMUNITION - PHASE-OUT

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department of Natural Resources provides the following information regarding SB 983. While some evidence suggests that it is appropriate to phase out the use of all lead ammunition for hunting purposes, the availability of suitable non-lead ammunition must be readily available to fill the void. Currently, the most popular rifle calibers are available in non-lead variants but can be of varying effectiveness when compared to lead variants. Unfortunately, less common calibers that are still widely used, particularly for deer hunting, are not consistently available in non-lead versions. Likewise, .22 rimfire ammunition, which is widely used by many hunters for small game, in general is less accurate and less lethal than lead ammunition.

The Department recommends action be taken at the federal level regarding the phasing out of lead ammunition. A federal approach would bring consistency across states and encourage ammunition manufacturers to increase production of non-lead alternatives. Presently, there is little incentive for manufacturers to undertake a major shift in hunting ammunition production and it is unlikely that the availability of this type of ammunition will change significantly by December 31, 2026 as specified in SB 983.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service instituted a nationwide ban on non-toxic shotgun ammunition in 1991. Currently, California is the only state with a complete ban on lead ammunition.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 983 would prohibit the use of all lead or lead-based ammunition for hunting by December 31, 2026 and require the Department of Natural Resources to create a certification program for non-lead ammunition that could be used for hunting purposes. The department would be required to prioritize deer hunting when codifying the lead prohibition.

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