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# News Release

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## **Goose Die-Off in Willamette Valley Under Investigation**

*Agents suspect the geese may have been poisoned*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is investigating the deaths of more than three dozen resident Canada geese in the past couple weeks in two different locations around the Willamette Valley. Zinc phosphide, a rodenticide, is suspected as the cause of death.

A total of 36 dead geese were found August 18 and August 19 near Dayton and another 11 dead geese were found August 22 near Hillsboro. Carcasses from each group have been sent to a Michigan State University lab for testing.

The geese appear to have suffered the same death as several hundred geese, mostly migratory, that were found dead between November 2004 and March 2005 in six locations around the Willamette Valley, said Jim Stinebaugh, a special agent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Zinc phosphide has been confirmed as the poison that killed those geese.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agents are investigating whether those geese died as a result of the misuse of zinc phosphide, which is regulated in its application. Label restrictions say that zinc phosphide may only be applied by hand, must be placed directly in a burrow and the amount used per application is not to exceed 1 teaspoon. The Oregon Department of Agriculture has implemented Special Local Needs Labels (SLN's) that permit farmers to spread zinc phosphide on fields from May 1 through August 31, when fewer geese are present in the Willamette Valley. During this time period farmers are still responsible for any bird deaths associated with the use of zinc phosphide.

Geese, whether resident or migratory, are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Zinc phosphide is a rodenticide used to control small rodents such as voles, mice and ground squirrels, particularly in agricultural fields where such rodents can cause significant damage to crops. It is highly toxic to rodents, birds, fish and other wildlife, although it is not believed to be hazardous to birds of prey that eat rodents that have been killed by it. When zinc phosphide is ingested it is converted by stomach acids to phosphine gas, which acts on the heart, kidney and liver; death occurs from heart and kidney

failure. Death usually occurs within 15 minutes to four hours after ingestion of a toxic dose, but sometimes death may not occur for several days.

In the die-offs last winter, a total of about 300 Canada geese were found dead near McMinnville, Keizer, Staats Lake in north Salem and Ankeny, Finley and Baskett Slough national wildlife refuges. Agents believe it is likely that more geese died but were not discovered or reported.

Special agent Stinebaugh is asking that anyone who finds dead geese or has information on the illegal use of zinc phosphide contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's law enforcement office in Wilsonville, 503-682-6131.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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