Wildlife damage managers and euthanasia

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Abstract: Wildlife damage managers regularly are faced with decisions that include whether and how animals will be killed. Euthanasia refers to death without pain or distress, i.e., a humane death. The American Veterinary Medical Association has developed guidelines for euthanasia (Andrews et al. 1993). These guidelines affect many of the methods and technologies involved in wildlife damage management. Carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, barbiturates, and gunshots are appropriate methods of euthanizing wildlife when necessary and when applied in the prescribed manner.

Key words: American Veterinary Medical Association, death, euthanasia, killing, traps, wildlife damage management.
9. Does the procedure have the potential for human abuse? Controlled substances may be very effective, but they might also lead to abuse by personnel. In addition, these chemicals usually require strict accounting, which may be difficult under some field conditions.

10. Can the procedure be utilized over a broad range of ages and species, or is it highly specialized for one species or a specific age class of one species?

11. Finally, does the procedure require complex maintenance to keep it in good working order? The more difficult and complex a procedure is, the higher the risk of something going wrong, resulting in increased pain and distress.

How do these criteria apply to techniques used in wildlife damage management (Schmidt 1994b)? A number of techniques exist that are appropriate to kill an animal in a humane manner. However, they should be used as prescribed.

Carbon dioxide, from a compressed cylinder or from dry ice, is acceptable. When using dry ice, it is important to keep the animal from coming into physical contact with the ice. Carbon dioxide from a fire extinguisher is not acceptable.

Carbon monoxide is also acceptable. It induces unconsciousness without pain and with minimal discomfort. However, only commercially compressed carbon monoxide is recommended. Exhaust fumes from internal combustion engines are not acceptable because of criteria 1, 2, 4, and 11 above. With a combustion engine, other gases besides carbon monoxide are produced, the concentration of carbon monoxide cannot be controlled, the cooling of the gases is difficult, and the equipment must be in good working order.

Barbiturates, when available, are recommended euthanasia agents. However, training is essential, and there is strict accounting required of all regulated barbiturates.

Gunshots are considered acceptable when other methods cannot be used. Personnel should be trained, and the recommended target area should be the brain. The firearm and the ammunition should be appropriate for the species.

The AVMA Panel on Euthanasia (Andrews et al. 1993:243) noted that “Kill traps are practical and effective for animal collection when used in a manner that minimizes the potential for attraction and collection of non-target species. Traps should be checked at least once daily. In those instances when an animal is wounded or captured but not dead, the animal must be killed quickly and humanely.”

Finally, the AVMA panel outlined unacceptable agents and methods. These included decompression, rapid freezing, use of an air embolism, drowning, strychnine, chloroform, cyanide, and stunning. Stunning is acceptable to render an animal unconscious, but must be followed by an acceptable killing technique.

Whether you agree with the AVMA Panel findings or not, it is important to understand the rationale behind them in order to better assess procedures that you use, and so you can explain and defend techniques used as part of your operation. There are an increasing number of technical articles on injuries and time to death associated with a variety of commercial traps, and there is currently an international effort to develop “humane” standards for many trapping devices (Jotham and Phillips 1994). Additional information on euthanasia and animal pain can be found in Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (1972), Committee on Pain and Distress in Laboratory Animals (1992), Longair et al. (1991), and Fowler (1995).

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LITERATURE CITED


