

SENATE BILL 181

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(PRE-FILED)

6lr0628
CF 6lr2452

By: **Senator Lewis Young**

Requested: July 7, 2025

Introduced and read first time: January 14, 2026

Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Hunting – Lead and Lead-Based Ammunition – Phase-Out**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring the Department of Natural Resources to require, through a
4 certain phasing-out process, the use of nonlead ammunition for the hunting of all
5 game species on or before a certain date under certain circumstances; and generally
6 relating to phasing out the use of lead or lead-based ammunition for hunting.

7 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
8 Article – Natural Resources
9 Section 10–408
10 Annotated Code of Maryland
11 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

12 Preamble

13 WHEREAS, England, Scotland, and Wales will phase out the use of lead ammunition
14 by 2029 in recognition of the serious cumulative health and environmental impacts on
15 humans and animals; and

16 WHEREAS, Over 500 peer-reviewed studies recognize that there is no safe level of
17 lead exposure for humans; and

18 WHEREAS, Peer-reviewed studies have shown that individuals working at shooting
19 ranges have developed severe toxicity and increased health challenges as a result of
20 exposure to lead ammunition; and

21 WHEREAS, It has been shown that the shattering of lead ammunition upon striking
22 bone in an animal can spread into dozens of lead fragments that are not readily visible by
23 the naked eye, but are detectable using X-ray technology; and

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



WHEREAS, Over 50,000 deer are killed by firearms in the State annually, and the meat is consumed by hunters and family members; and

WHEREAS, Venison is donated in substantial amounts to food banks, and those receiving the donated meat may be unknowingly ingesting lead; and

WHEREAS, Wildlife, such as the bald eagle, are being poisoned by ingesting lead particles that are left in abandoned pieces of animal carcasses; and

WHEREAS, The health care system, educational system, and criminal justice system are being unnecessarily burdened by exposure to and ingestion of lead ammunition; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Natural Resources

10–408.

(a) **(1)** In this section[, “handgun”] **THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.**

(2) “HANDGUN” means a firearm:

[(1)] (I) With a barrel length not exceeding 6 inches; and

[(2)] (II) That does not have a scope or an electronic device attached.

(3) “NONLEAD AMMUNITION” INCLUDES:

(I) AMMUNITION IN WHICH THERE IS LESS THAN 1% LEAD CONTENT; AND

(II) ANY FEDERALLY APPROVED NONTOXIC AMMUNITION.

(b) **(1)** Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, the Department shall:

(i) Prescribe by regulation the means or weapons for hunting designated wildlife; and

(ii) Set forth any restrictions relating to weapons used to hunt designated wildlife, including the amount [and], size, **AND TYPE** of ammunition for designated game birds or mammals.

(2) The Department may not prohibit a licensed bow hunter from openly carrying a handgun that the hunter is otherwise authorized to carry under § 4–203 of the Criminal Law Article if the bow hunter:

- (i) Is at least 21 years old;
- (ii) Is hunting in deer management Region A as defined by the Department's Guide to Hunting and Trapping;
- (iii) Is carrying the handgun for personal protection; and
- (iv) Does not use the handgun to kill wildlife wounded by a vertical bow or crossbow.

(c) The Department shall make the regulations available for distribution with each hunting license purchased.

(d) This section does not authorize the Department to restrict the use of firearms except in the activity of hunting designated wildlife.

(E) (1) EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION, ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2029, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL REQUIRE THE USE OF NONLEAD AMMUNITION FOR THE HUNTING OF ALL GAME SPECIES.

(2) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL AUTHORIZE THE USE OF LEAD AMMUNITION FOR MUZZLELOADERS, HANDGUNS, RIFLES, AND SHOTGUNS IF NONLEAD AMMUNITION IS NOT COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE FOR THE SPECIFIC WEAPON.

(3) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ADOPT REGULATIONS TO CARRY OUT THIS SUBSECTION.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That:

(a) On or before July 1, 2027, the Department of Natural Resources shall adopt regulations requiring the use of nonlead ammunition for hunting pen-raised birds on regulated shooting areas.

(b) On or before July 1, 2028, the Department of Natural Resources shall adopt regulations requiring the use of nonlead ammunition for hunting:

- (1) upland game birds;
- (2) webless migratory game birds; and
- (3) wild turkey.

1 (c) On or before July 1, 2029, the Department of Natural Resources shall adopt
2 regulations requiring nonlead ammunition for:

3 (1) muzzleloaders, handguns, rifles, and shotguns used for hunting deer;
4 and

5 (2) hunting any other game species not specified in this section.

6 SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July
7 1, 2026.