

# Company fined for poisoning horses 1988

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Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Co. must pay \$15,000 in fines for allowing contaminated water to poison 61 wild horses on the Tonopah Test Range in November.

The company must also develop three new springs on the public land from which the animals can drink.

The maximum amount the government contractor could have been fined was \$86,000, which included \$25,000 plus \$1,000 in damages for each horse that died.

Terri Jay, executive director of

the state Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses, was less than pleased with the outcome.

"It's better than nothing, which is usually the case in prosecution of people who have caused harm to wild horses," she said. "My personal preference obviously is that they (REECo) would have had to pay the maximum."

The \$15,000 will go to the wild horse commission.

REECo was ordered to pay the fine by the state Division of Environmental Protection for discharging the chemical urea into public water on the test range.

A REECo employee washed the

chemical — used as a de-icing agent — out of a truck near the REECo complex, creating a toxic liquid that flowed into a nearby pond and created standing pools from which the horses drank. Thirty-one horses died almost immediately from ammonia toxicity, and 30 more died the following weekend.

At least 10 of the horses were shot by security guards under the direction of a veterinarian, who said the animals were suffering horribly.

The pools and pond have since been covered with rocks and dirt.

Lew Dodgion, administrator of

the environmental protection division, said the new springs would be located away from the complex, and would be fenced to prevent damage. REECo must maintain the springs for three years, he said.

"Part of the problem out there is there is not a lot of available water for the horses, so they were drawn to other sources (nearer the human population)," Dodgion said.

REECo officials do not yet have an estimate on the cost of developing the springs, he added.

The \$1,000-per-horse penalty was eventually dropped, Dodgion said, "because it is very difficult to

## Fined

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determine the value of a wild horse." The \$15,000 includes a criminal penalty for discharging the chemical and damages for the dead horses, he said.

"This stuff's not going to be done again, or there will be severe penalties," Dodgion added.

Dr. Alan Ruegamer, who examined the horses and supervised the destruction of 10 of them, said at the time he thought too many horses were roaming the test range, causing them to move closer to the REECo complex in search of water.

Jay disagrees with that assessment.

"Horses either adapt to human habitation or they die," she said. "We have wild horses in Virginia City and in Round Mountain you can touch, and there are burros in Southern Nevada that flag down cars to get Twinkies."

"REECo is still guilty of polluting the waters of the state, and that was made clear by the environmental protection division. That (Ruegamer's) argument is like saying if a herd of horses crosses the road and you hit them, you're not at fault for going 70 miles an hour in a 50 zone."