

REECo fined \$86,000 in horse deaths

By Caryn Shetterly
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The state Division of Environmental Protection has told a Nevada Test Site contractor it must pay \$86,000 in fines for the ammonia poisoning of 61 wild horses last November on the Tonopah Test Range.

Representatives from the department, Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Co. Inc. and the Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses will meet Monday in Carson City to discuss the fines.

REECo attorneys also have applied for a hearing before the state environmental commission.

Terri Jay, executive director of the wild horse preservation commission, said Saturday that the \$86,000 figure includes a \$25,000 fine for pollution of water, plus a civil penalty of \$1,000 per horse

killed after the chemical urea flowed into the animals' water source.

At least some of the money would go to the preservation commission.

The wild horse preservation commission, meanwhile, wants the 1989 Legislature to make it a felony to kill the animals, some 28,000 of which roam Nevada lands. Killing a wild horse is a gross misdemeanor under Nevada law.

Federal and state laws impose financial penalties or prison time or both for harassing or killing wild horses.

The three-member commission met Saturday and discussed the REECo incident as well as the proposed statute change.

Commission Chairman Deloyd Satterthwaite said he had assurances from state Sen. Dean Rhoads a bill changing the law would be

introduced this session.

Lew Dodgion, administrator of the Division of Environmental Protection, met with REECo officials last month after the 61 wild horses died from drinking urea, a chemical used as a de-icing agent on test range roads.

A REECo employee washed the chemical from a truck, sending the poisonous liquid into a pond and creating standing pools from which the wild horses drank. The animals died of ammonia poisoning.

Satterthwaite, who also is president of the Nevada Cattlemen's Association, made a prediction on Monday's meeting in Carson City.

"I'm sure REECo will claim this was an accident and will say there was no malicious intent," he said. "It is my belief it was an accident."

The incident at the test range further incensed officials of the Humane Society of Southern Ne-

vada, who discovered bets of \$1 had been made by 17 Advance Security guards on the number of horses that would die. Thirty-one horses died within two days, and 30 more were discovered during the weekend of Nov. 5.

Dart Anthony, chairman of the Humane Society board, attended Saturday's commission meeting, and said his organization was conducting its own investigation of the deaths. The guards, who have since apologized for the betting, should be fired, Anthony said.

REECo also faces federal criminal charges from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which oversees wild horse herds across the state. The bureau continues to investigate the November deaths, but makes none of the information available to the public until the probe is concluded.

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