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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT MOVES TO CURB GUAM RABIES EPIDEMIC

At the urgent request of the Governor of Guam, Manuel F. L. Guerrero, the Department of the Interior announced today it has moved to provide technical assistance in curbing a serious rabies outbreak on the Pacific island.

The first case of rabies ever to occur on Guam was reported last March. Since then, the disease has been reported in free-running dogs and cats, in deer and shrews. By the end of September, 32 humans had been exposed and were under treatment. Customary control methods have not reduced the high number of dogs on the island nor halted spread of the dread disease.

In cooperation with the Office of Territories and the U.S. Public Health Service, technical personnel from Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife have been working closely with Guam officials to develop a local control program. Following the increase in human exposures and at the request of local officials and the Public Health Service, Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has begun emergency measures using Compound 1080 (Sodium Fluoroacetate) for swift reduction of feral dogs and cats. This chemical, highly toxic to carnivores, is used only under rigid supervision and controlled conditions.

"There is only one course to take in this situation," John S. Gottschalk, Sport Fisheries and Wildlife director, said. "We must move swiftly, with the best means at our disposal, even though we are reluctant to employ lethal methods to control dogs. The alternative is to risk human fatalities and a further spread of the disease. Clearly we must take immediate action to protect humans, and this is what we have done."

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