

Is Baby Safe to Sleep?

Roughly 4,000 infants die every year in the United States for no immediately obvious reason. When the cause cannot be determined, about half the deaths are attributed to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

SIDS rates started dropping around 1992, when pediatricians began recommending that babies be placed on their backs to sleep. State and national educational efforts also focused on educating parents about the risks.

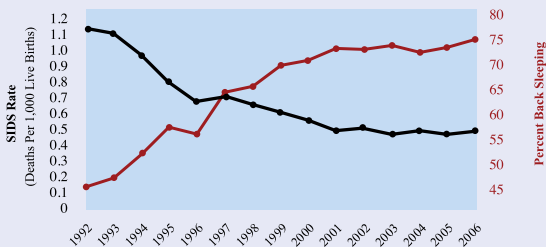
By 2006, SIDS rates had decreased by more than 50 percent. But recently, rates have leveled off. At the same time, some types of sleep-related infant deaths, such as suffocation and hypothermia, have increased. This has prompted health experts and some policymakers to call for more comprehensive efforts to reduce unsafe sleeping conditions.

In 2013, lawmakers in Hawaii and Minnesota passed measures requiring child care providers to adhere to “Safe to Sleep” recommendations that pediatricians developed in 2011. They include always placing a baby on its back to sleep; using a firm sleep surface covered by a fitted sheet; not having the baby sleep in the parents’ bed; removing soft objects such as pillows, toys and quilts from a baby’s bed; and eliminating all smoking during pregnancy, which doctors estimate would prevent a third of SIDS deaths.

In addition, the Affordable Care Act requires Medicaid to cover the cost of smoking-cessation programs for pregnant women.

—Bryan Kelley

SIDS Rate and Back Sleeping



Source: *The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*

SL ONLINE

For more information on NCSL’s resources and state laws on SIDS, go to <http://www.ncsl.org>

Getting the Lead Out



Why Hunters Hunt

Stalking prey over rough terrain or sitting patiently in a blind—what makes a hunter hunt?

Putting meat on the table is the No. 1 reason given by 35 percent of respondents in a recent survey. Thirty-three percent said they hunt mainly for “sports and recreation.”

Fifty-five percent of female hunters said obtaining meat was the main reason they hunt, compared to 27 percent of males.

The economic downturn and the increasing preference for local, nonprocessed food may contribute to the trend.

Source: *Responsive Management of Harrisonburg, Va., American Sportfishing Association, Southwick Associates and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.*

California has bagged another legislative first: a ban on lead in hunting ammunition. The legislation seeks to reduce the potential harm lead shot poses to animal and human health. Conservationists have long supported the ban to protect America’s largest flying bird: the eponymous condor (it’s depicted on the California quarter), whose population dwindled to 22 three decades ago. Strong conservation efforts have increased its population to 424 in Arizona and California, although only half are in the wild.

Condors can be poisoned when they scavenge carcasses containing lead-bullet fragments, left by hunters. According to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, lead caused 34 percent of the 123 California Condor deaths from 1992 to 2012. California banned lead shot in eight counties in 2007, but the condors’ range is so big it was largely ineffective. The statewide ban will likely also benefit scavengers such as bald eagles, golden eagles and other raptors.

A national ban already exists on lead shot for waterfowl hunting, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates saves more than 1 million ducks a year by reducing the spent bullets on the ground they mistake for food and eat.

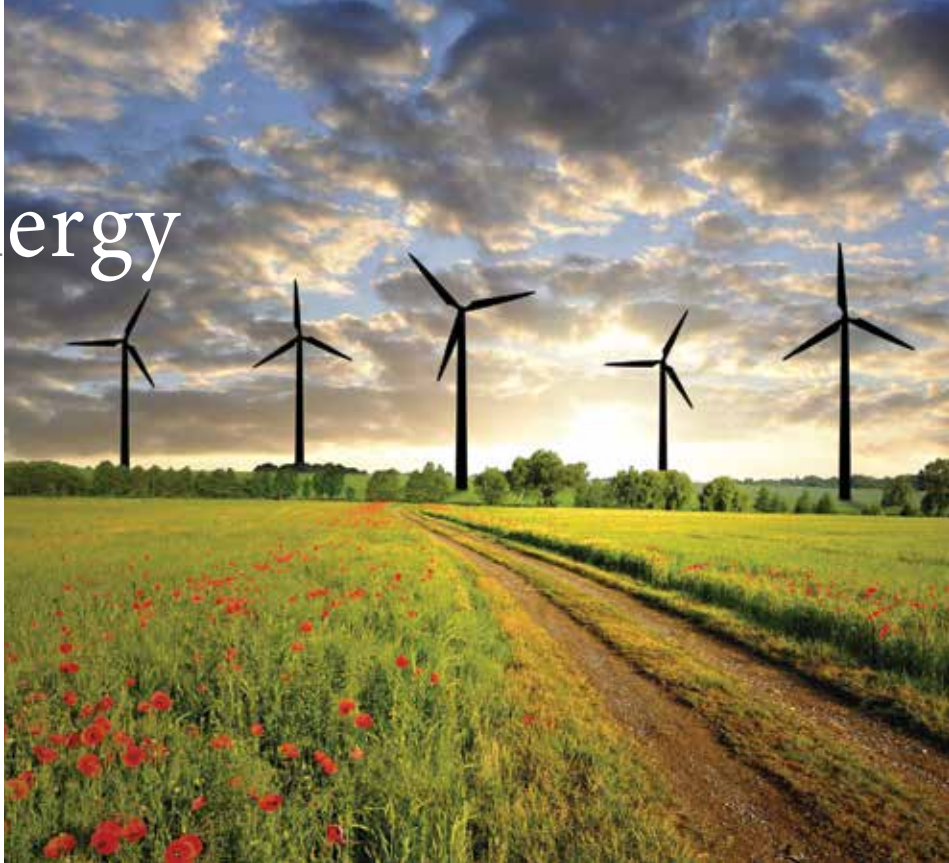
Critics of California’s new law say lead shot’s impact on the birds has not been scientifically proved. They point out that condors may be ingesting lead from other sources. Sportsmen also worry the ban will make ammunition more expensive and keep more would-be hunters at home. Ultimately, they say, conservation efforts and fish and wildlife agencies will suffer because hunting licenses are their main source of funds.

To address these concerns, the law directs the California Fish and Game Commission to help provide hunters with no- or low-cost unleaded ammunition. To give manufacturers enough time to get the lead out, the ban doesn’t go into effect until 2019.

Iowa lawmakers considered, but did not pass, a similar ban on lead shot in 2013.

—Doug Shinkle

Renewable Energy Mandates on Front Burner



Renewable energy continues to be a hot topic in legislatures. Thirty states considered a wide variety of bills last year on Renewable Portfolio Standards, which require utilities to buy a certain quantity of renewable energy by a specific date. Currently, 29 states and Washington, D.C., have some type of Renewable Portfolio Standard, and another eight states have voluntary targets. These standards drive the country's \$36 billion market for wind, solar, biomass and other renewable technologies.

Even though renewable sources can be more expensive than electricity from gas or coal, rapidly declining costs have made renewables competitive in a number of regions. Supporters say any potential added costs are worth it because renewables boost energy diversity and provide a hedge against increasing fuel costs. Renewables also are integral to many state efforts to reduce pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.

But critics argue renewables increase costs for consumers or do little to improve the environment. With natural gas prices at an all-time low, they advocate for a free market approach to determine what source of power utilities should purchase. Last year, lawmakers in 17 states considered 30 bills to repeal Renewable Portfolio Standards altogether, extend compliance deadlines for utilities or reduce the percentage of renewable energy required. None of the bills have passed, although bills in nine states are pending or were carried over to this year's sessions.

In Kansas, for example, lawmakers defeated two bills to repeal the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard, which mandates that 20 percent of energy utilities sell comes from renewable sources by 2020 and establishes a cost cap of 1 percent on rate increases. Kansas' wind energy industry has grown significantly in recent years because of the standards. Seven manufacturing facilities there support 4,000 to 5,000 jobs, according to the American Wind Energy Association.

Seventeen states considered—and Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota and Nevada passed—measures to strengthen their Renewable Portfolio Standards by increasing overall renewable requirements or assigning specific targets for certain energy sources. Connecticut,

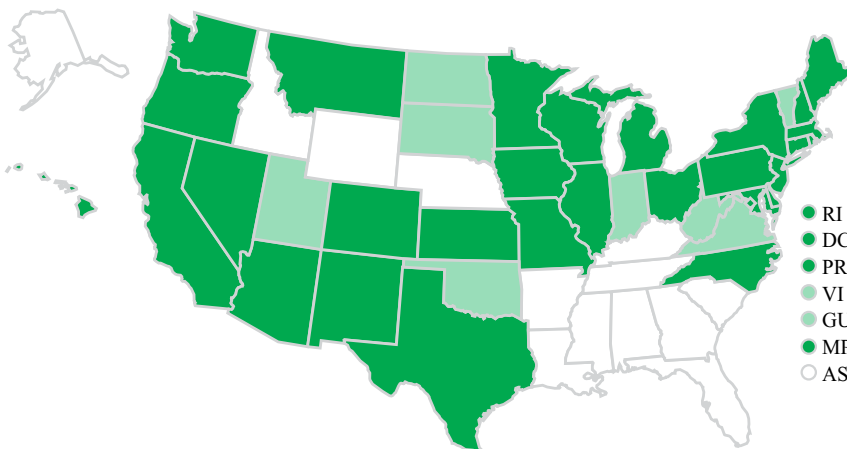
Maryland, Montana and Virginia expanded their definitions of renewable energy to include additional technologies, most commonly thermal energy or small hydropower. Attempts to establish standards in Georgia and Kentucky failed.

Across the country, most of the legislative activity (88 bills) involved more technical matters, including modifying existing renewable energy requirements or voluntary targets. Eighteen of these bills passed.

—Jocelyn Durkay

RENEWABLE STANDARDS

- States/territories that have Renewable Portfolio Standards
- States/territories that have a voluntary renewable energy standard
- States/territories that have neither



Source: Database for State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency, Nov. 30, 2013

It's All Relative

When home is an unsafe place to live, children often benefit by staying with familiar adults. Recently, lawmakers have been making it even easier for grandparents and other relatives to be the loving caregivers for children in stressful situations. States grant provisional, emergency or temporary foster care licenses that allow relatives who are waiting for a full license to care for children after certain basic safety checks have been completed. Foster care licenses allow relatives to receive the full foster care rate for children in their care as well as an array of other services.

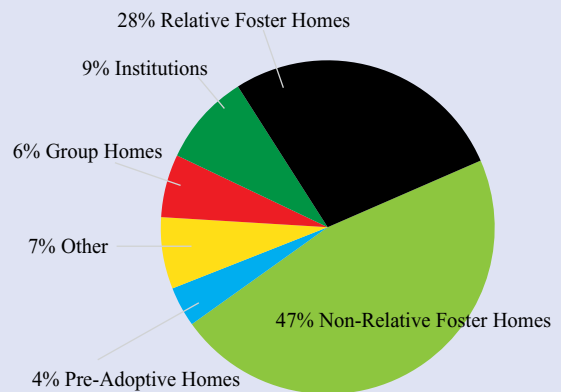
States also grant waivers from certain nonsafety requirements, such as limits on the age of a relative caregiver. While these provisions are usually in state child welfare regulations, recent legislation in Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Nevada, Utah and Virginia also addresses licensing for relative caregivers.

In other actions:

- ◆ California, Colorado, Hawaii, Indiana and Nevada have expanded the definition of “relative” to include more distant relatives such as great-aunts or second cousins.
- ◆ Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, New York and Virginia have increased financial support to relatives who become legal guardians.
- ◆ Louisiana expanded life insurance coverage to include grandchildren in the legal custody of a grandparent.

FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS

Where America's 397,122 foster children called home in 2012.



Source: Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, November 2013



The federal government prohibits states from establishing a separate foster care licensing system for relatives—they must meet the same licensing standards as a non-relative. The federal Fostering Connections Act of 2008 requires that relatives be notified within 30 days of a child's removal from home. The act clarifies that states may waive certain nonsafety licensing standards on a case-by-case basis for relative foster family homes. For example, a state that requires foster homes to provide a separate bedroom for each child could choose to exempt a prospective relative foster parent with only one bedroom available and still license the home. The act also offers states the option of providing payments (using federal Title IV-E funds) to licensed grandparents and other relatives who assume legal guardianship of children.

—Nina Williams-Mbengue

SL ONLINE

For 50-state information on relative foster family homes, go to www.ncsl.org/magazine.