

Cell tower blamed in animal deaths

Farmer suspects cell relay tower in the deaths of her animals.

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TESTS: Government steps in to try to find toll's cause

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Rabbits, goats, even a horse are among the roughly 100 animals to mysteriously die at a Nova Scotia farm in the past five years.

And with the recent deaths of a number of wild birds at the farm, the provincial natural resources department has stepped in and sent one of the animal carcasses to the Atlantic Veterinary College for testing.

But after years of questions, Paula White believes she knows the cause: a cellphone relay tower erected beside the farm. A tenant on the farm for the past two years, White said the farm's owner purchased the property about a year before the tower went up. Before the tower, the farm's owner never experienced problems.

"When that tower went up, he ended up losing his animals little by little," the Annapolis County woman said yesterday.

White outlined a litany of deaths on the farm. She described a dog staggering around and then keeling over and spoke of a goat suddenly dying from a seizure. Four years ago, a horse fell over on its side, never to recover.

How many animals have died? "You couldn't count them," White said. Over the winter, she filled a large truck box with the bodies of rabbits and birds.

It's the latter that's attracted the attention of the province's natural resource department. Upon hearing of robins, finches and other songbirds dying at the property, department officials requested that the farm owner send an animal for testing to the Atlantic Veterinary College in Charlottetown.

College vets will conduct tests on a guinea pig that died at the farm, but it could be weeks before they have answers.

Julie Towers, director of the Nova Scotia department's wildlife division, said they're not certain what they'll find. "There are just too many open-ended possibilities. I have a lot of questions."

Some of those questions include just how many animals have died, what symptoms they've displayed and whether all the deaths are linked. "It's rather surprising that there would be anything that would be hitting different species like this," Towers said.

One thing Marc Choma is certain isn't responsible for the problem is a cell tower. The spokesman with the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association maintained that scientists worldwide — including from the World Health Organization — have found no health effects from cell towers.

White doesn't understand what else might be the source of the problem. The former SPCA worker says the animals are well fed and watered and don't suffer from poor living conditions. "I've got cages in here that you could live in," she said.

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