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Basic Tips for Circus Elephant Inspections



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A Guide for Animal Control Officers,
Humane Investigators, and
State Wildlife Agents

BASIC TIPS FOR CIRCUS ELEPHANT INSPECTIONS

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) opposes the use of elephants in circuses. Circuses subject elephants to cruel training and constant confinement. “Positive reinforcement” is little more than a myth propagated by the circus industry. Trainers dominate animals using painful punishment to ensure that they perform tricks on command.

An October 11, 2002, editorial in the *Detroit Free Press*, entitled, “Circus Entertainment Comes at the Expense of Animals,” by Ron Kagan, director of the Detroit Zoo, stated, “Living on the road, circus animals are not able to have either appropriate physical or social environments. Constant travel in the back of a truck or train, daily and prolonged restraint—often including chaining or confinement in small barred cages—and rigorous physical training and discipline are all very stressful. ... In my view, anyone who strikes an elephant—or any other animal—should be prosecuted for animal cruelty.”

Circuses are regulated by the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which is enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The AWA establishes only bare-minimum guidelines for certain species. For example, the AWA does not protect horses, ponies, birds, rats, mice, reptiles, or amphibians. The AWA does not prohibit the use of bullhooks, whips, electrical shock, or other commonly used devices that cause pain and suffering. The AWA also does not address the special physical and social needs of elephants. The USDA may inspect circuses as infrequently as once per year.

A federal exhibitor license does not exempt a circus from state and local laws. Because federal laws are weak and poorly enforced, many state and local governments have enacted stricter laws to protect animals and the public, and a

Tips for Videotaping

Do not talk while filming. Slowly film the entire body. Zoom out and hold the camera steady on the entire elephant. Zoom in and film the elephant’s feet for several seconds.

growing number of communities are banning the use of exotic animals in traveling shows.

In the past, circuses often took advantage of the fact that animal control officers, humane investigators, and state wildlife agents were unfamiliar with exotic species, such as elephants. Because of heightened public awareness and evidence of routine mistreatment in circuses, local authorities are now giving closer scrutiny to traveling animal acts. As a result, local enforcement agencies that monitor circuses commonly find violations of municipal codes and humane laws.

Before the circus comes to town, establish a relationship with your local zoo and exotic animal veterinarians. When the circus arrives, make frequent, unannounced inspections. During the initial visit to the circus, notify the person in charge that you are conducting an inspection. Do not allow circus personnel to intimidate or threaten you. Ask to review all paperwork, such as current permits, health certificates, and recent USDA inspection reports. Notify the USDA if your inspection reveals a new AWA violation or a previously identified violation that remains out of compliance.

Inspect the elephants first. Ask circus officials if the elephants have any injuries or illnesses. Walk around and closely examine each elephant. Check the elephants each day that the circus is in town. Arrive at least 30 minutes before performances and observe the animals during the shows and elephant rides and after performances.

It is very important to do your job as you normally would. Do not allow circus officials to influence your judgment. Be certain to take photographs and videotape as evidence of potential mistreatment.

Unloading

Monitor elephants as they are unloaded, and watch for signs of lameness, such as an uneven gait, stiff or unbending legs, or limping. Arthritis and crippling injuries are common in elephants used in circuses. Traveling and performing can aggravate these conditions and cause intense



Check trailers or boxcars for an excessive accumulation of feces and urine.

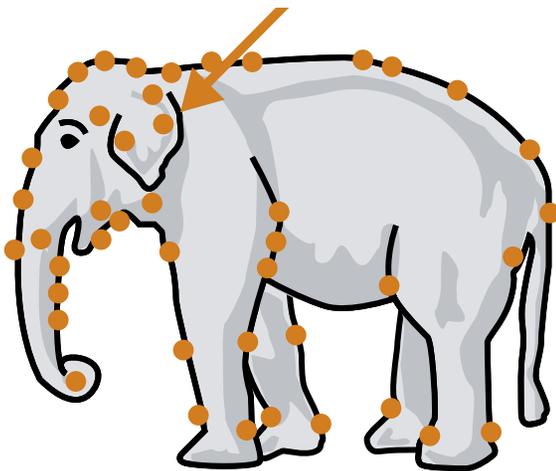


pain. Elephants with such conditions should be retired. Forcing disabled animals to perform or give rides may be a violation of local ordinances.

Check trailers or boxcars for an excessive accumulation of feces and urine. When a circus arrives at a destination, often the elephants have been shackled and unable to move for many hours and sometimes days. Chronically wet and unsanitary conditions and inadequate exercise are major causes of potentially deadly foot rot and abscesses.

Physical Abuse

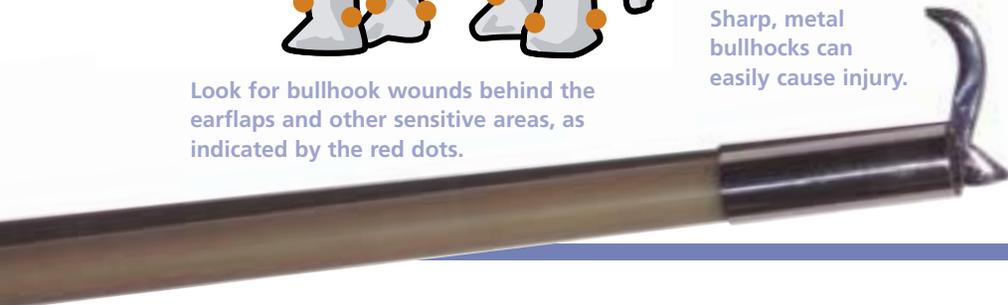
Check for signs of bullhook wounds, scars, or dry, peeling skin. Bullhook injuries are typically behind the ears. Ask the handler to fold the elephant's earflaps forward, and look for bullhook wounds. An elephant's skin is extremely sensitive and bleeds easily. Circuses use bullhooks to punish and control elephants. Trainers often embed the hook in the soft tissue behind the ears, inside the ear or mouth, in and around the anus, and in tender spots on the trunk, under the chin, and around the feet. Some bullhooks are discreetly designed to also serve as electric prods—one end has a sharp, metal hook, and the other end has hidden prongs that deliver an electrical current.



Look for bullhook wounds behind the earflaps and other sensitive areas, as indicated by the red dots.

A powder called Wonder Dust is used to conceal bloody bullhook wounds. Within hours of being punctured by a bullhook, a welt or boil may erupt. The wound may grow larger if it becomes infected. Heavy blows can result in tissue damage that will cause

Sharp, metal bullhooks can easily cause injury.



Lighter gray spots are applications of Wonder Dust, which is used to conceal bloody wounds. These areas on the hind legs are where trainers hook and poke elephants to make them move forward faster. Photo on the right shows an elephant with hook boils.

the skin to die and slough off.

While performing in the ring, an elephant responds to verbal commands from a trainer carrying a bullhook and moderate pressure from the bullhook because the elephant has been conditioned through violent training sessions to know that refusal to obey in the ring will result in severe punishment later. Moments before entering the ring, while out of public view, trainers may give the elephants a few painful whacks to remind them who's boss and ensure that the elephants perform the specified tricks on command.

Abnormal Behaviors

- Elephants who drag their trunks may be suffering from partial trunk paralysis caused by trauma. There should be a record of veterinary care for this condition.
- Open-mouthed breathing can be a sign that an elephant is in pain.
- Bringing their ears forward and extending them out from the head, spraying water or dirt, and using their trunks to throw objects at people can all be signs of aggression.
- Look for signs of "stereotypic" behavior—rocking, swaying, head-bobbing, or other repetitive movement. Stereotypic behavior is a sign of psychological distress.
- Elephants typically will not lie down on their own in the presence of strangers.

An elephant who remains in a recumbent position may be sick.

- Crossing their legs may indicate irritation and itching caused by chaining, a stomach ache, and/or joint pain.

Foot Care

Check for cracked and infected toenails and overgrown nails, cuticles, and footpads. Swelling, discoloration, and peeling skin above the nail may indicate infection. At least half of the elephants in captivity experience foot problems, which can result in serious disability or death. Foot infections and arthritis are the leading reasons for euthanizing captive elephants. Lack of exercise, long hours standing on hard substrates, and contamination resulting from standing in their own feces and urine are major contributors to foot-related conditions. Confined elephants require routine pedicures.

Illness and Poor Hygiene

In the wild, elephants take daily baths and rub against trees, sand, and rocks to remove dead skin. In captivity, caretakers should wash elephants daily to maintain healthy skin. Elephants in circuses may show an excessive accumulation of necrotic skin as a result of poor husbandry and infrequent baths. Some circuses apply petroleum-based Vaseline around the elephant's eyes to prevent a buildup of tears that hardens when dry and becomes difficult to remove without ripping the sensitive skin. Bathing elephants daily eliminates the need for this practice.

Temporal glands are located midway between the eye and ear. Slight, clear

Overgrown, infected, and cracked nails are serious and indicate poor husbandry.



secretions are normal. Swelling or a discharge of pus may indicate a temporal gland disorder and should be examined by a veterinarian.

Pressure wounds are similar to bed sores in humans. They are painful skin ulcers caused by lying on unnaturally hard surfaces, such as concrete, asphalt, or hard, compressed dirt. These can become abscessed and require veterinary treatment.

Older female Asian elephants in captivity frequently develop leiomyomas, or fibroid tumors, of the genital tract. This condition is abnormal. There should be records indicating that a veterinarian has examined the tumors.

Environmental Conditions

Look for clean drinking water, hay, and fresh produce. When water is provided, observe whether the elephant drinks continuously for several minutes, an indication of excessive thirst.

Look for evidence that elephants are chained, such as ankle bracelets and brackets in the floor, ground, or wall.

Elephants in the wild spend most of their time foraging, roaming, and bathing. In

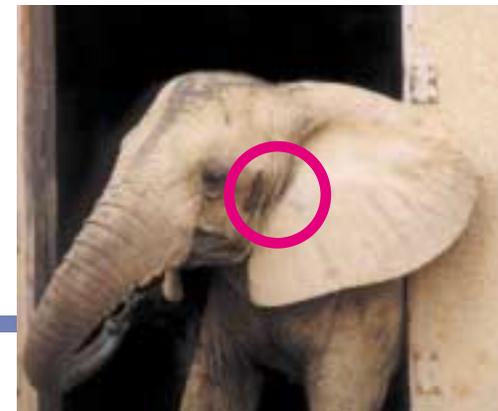


Leiomyoma protruding externally from a female Asian elephant



Pressure wound

Normal temporal gland secretion





Look for evidence that elephants are chained, such as ankle bracelets and brackets in the floor, ground, or wall.

contrast, elephants in circuses spend most of their time shackled. The American Zoo and Aquarium Association prohibits prolonged chaining because the practice is inhumane and harmful. Some circuses erect small pens surrounded by electrical wire where elephants are displayed periodically for public relations purposes. Such penning may not be indicative of how they are typically kept.

Housing any female elephant in solitary confinement, whether in



a traveling exhibit or a stationary zoo, is particularly cruel. Check to make sure that elephants are housed at least in pairs. If not, check to see if the singly housed elephants can interact frequently with others close by. Elephants are highly social, have strong emotions, and form tight bonds with one another. They feel joy, pleasure, and compassion, as well as sadness and grief. A female elephant's most basic need for her physical health and psychological well-being is the companionship of other elephants. The American Zoo and Aquarium Association has a policy against keeping female elephants in solitary confinement.

Look for adequate shade. Elephants are susceptible to sunstroke and sunburn. They must have access to shelter.

Contagious Tuberculosis

Protect yourself. A deadly and highly contagious human strain of tuberculosis (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis* or TB) is infecting and killing captive elephants. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has determined that USDA veterinary medical officers and animal care inspectors who conduct elephant inspections may be at risk for TB infection. TB transmission involving *M. tuberculosis* from infected elephants to humans has been reported between zoological workers and other animal handlers. TB infection of USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services personnel has been reported, although inadequate reporting procedures failed to identify the source of transmission. TB transmission from elephants to members of the public has never been studied.

TB is airborne and spreads through tiny droplets in the air. According to Dr. John Lewis of the International Zoo



This extremely thin elephant, Lota, was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1996. A photo taken in May 2001 shows a child petting her at a circus. A few months later, this elephant was taken off the road and again given tuberculosis treatment.



Veterinary Group, “[I]f tuberculosis is diagnosed in an elephant there are clear public health implications as the disease can be spread by close contact with infected animals [and] people.” Circuses routinely allow members of the public to feed, pet, and ride elephants.

Elephants in circuses are predisposed to tuberculosis because of routine transport that may expose them to other infected elephants and because of stress factors, including severe punishment, extreme confinement, inconsistent water quality and food supply, and poor nutrition.

Infected elephants may exhibit no symptoms of TB or may suffer from chronic weight loss, diminished appetite, chronic nasal discharge, coughing, and intolerance to exercise.

TB is difficult to identify in elephants. Elephants are too large to be x-rayed, skin tests are unreliable, and trunk wash cultures only indicate whether the elephant has active TB. No test can determine if an elephant is harboring a TB

infection. Circuses may also intentionally mislabel trunk wash specimens from infected animals, using a TB-negative animal as the donor. Most circuses have been cited by the USDA for failure to comply with TB testing requirements for elephants and handlers.

In Hawaii, the local police learned that they were ill-equipped to deal with a rampaging elephant.



Arsenal Used to Kill Rampaging Elephant (Honolulu, August 1994)

Weapon	Caliber of Ammunition	No. of Rounds
3 Smith & Wesson 9mm semi-automatic pistols	9mm Luger	20
1 Smith & Wesson .38 revolver pistol, model 67	.38 special	1
1 Ruger, .223 carbine rifle, model Mini-14	.223 Remington	30
1 Benelli, 12-gauge, semi-automatic shotgun, model M1 Super 90	12-gauge	21
1 Winchester, .30 caliber lever action rifle, model 94 ranger	30-30 Winchester	12
1 Remington, .308 carbine rifle, model 40X	.308 Winchester	3

Contingency Plans

Protect the public. Make certain that local law enforcement is equipped to handle an emergency in the event that an elephant runs amok. Circus personnel cannot protect themselves, let alone the general public, once an elephant rebels against a trainer's physical dominance. Stressed elephants rampage and are nearly impossible to stop without lethal force.

An elephant who went berserk in Florida in 1992 with five children on her back was shot with more than 50 rounds of ammunition before an officer was located who happened to have armor-piercing bullets specially designed by the military to penetrate steel. In 1994, an elephant's deadly rampage lasted an hour in downtown Honolulu. Department-issued semi-automatic pistols were useless, and a zoo veterinarian's lethal injections had no effect. The police finally located a high-powered counter-sniper rifle and fired three rounds into her heart. She had been shot 87 times.



For more information, visit PETA's Web site Circuses.com.
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