



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Performing Animal Welfare Society
Criticizes Response To Circus Tiger Escape
Organization Calls for Shriners To Discontinue Wild Animal Circuses**

San Andreas, Calif. – Following the escape of a tiger at the Shrine Circus in Salina, Kansas, on April 20, the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) today sent a letter to Isis Shrine Potentate James Hughes, urging him to find an alternative to circuses that use wild animals. The tiger escaped during a circus act and wandered out of the performance area into a public bathroom, where a woman came face to face with the animal.

PAWS' president Ed Stewart, who formerly worked with trained wild animals in live appearances in film and television, criticized the way that the Bicentennial Center, where the event was held, and Tarzan Zerbini Circus staff later downplayed the threat, calling it "reprehensible and a disservice to the public."

Stewart stated in his letter: "No matter how highly trained a tiger may be, it remains a dangerous wild animal and poses a serious threat to the public. Children are especially at risk, because they are easy targets for these powerful predators. The trainers know, the circus knows, and the Shriners know it is pure luck that no one was injured or killed at the Bicentennial Center."

Circuses have a history of tiger attacks and escapes, some of which resulted in serious injuries. "In fact, 'highly trained' tigers have attacked and seriously injured their handlers – the very people who are presumed to have the most control of the animal," noted Stewart. Notable incidents in circuses include:

- Hawthorn Corp. (2008) - Tiger attacked man at training facility causing serious injuries; it was the second attack on the man.
- Hadi Shrine Circus (2006) – Tiger attacked trainer during show.
- Cole Bros. Circus in New York City (2003) - Tiger escaped and was pursued for 30 minutes, traveling one mile through the city.
- UniverSoul Circus - (2004) Children were under a tent in area where tiger escaped; (2003) tiger escaped into alley, frightening employees at a nearby restaurant.
- Bruno Blaszak (2003) – Tiger mauled trainer in front of 400 people.
- Tangier Shrine Circus (2001) – Tiger clawed trainer during performance.
- Shrine Circus, Little Rock, Ark. (1993) – Tiger escaped into audience and bit 13-year-old girl.

Stewart explained it was no surprise that tigers would escape from circuses, and he predicted that it would happen again. Tigers can spend 11 months of the year confined in small cages, as they travel from show to show. The big cats are forced to perform unnatural tricks through physical violence, fear and intimidation. They are often whipped and jabbed with long poles.

“I urge the Shriners to consider hiring a circus that does not use wild animals,” concluded Stewart. “The risk is just too great for the public, and there is a much more positive message that can be sent to the children and adults supporting your good cause if you present a non-animal circus. Keep the clowns, acrobats and high wire acts, but it’s time for the animals to be freed from Shrine circuses in the U.S.A.”

Established in 1984, PAWS operates three sanctuaries located in Northern California, caring for over 100 animals, including tigers, lions, bears and elephants rescued from the exotic pet industry and performing animal trades. For more information about PAWS, please visit www.pawsweb.org.

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