

BCSPCA
BRITISH COLUMBIA
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

POSITION STATEMENT

ANIMALS IN RECREATION, SPORT AND ENTERTAINMENT

The BC SPCA is opposed to the infliction of pain or suffering upon, or the killing of any animal, for the purpose of recreation, sport, or entertainment.

The use of animals for recreation, sport, or entertainment is only acceptable if:

- the Five Freedoms are ensured for all animals involved, including breeding animals and animals that have been retired from the activity;
- humane training methods are used;
- risk of injury is low;
- their portrayal is not demeaning toward the individual animal or the species.

Approved by the Board of Directors – April 2008

BACKGROUND

Animals are used for recreation, sport and entertainment at a range of venues (e.g., zoos, aquariums, rodeos, circuses, film and television sets) for a variety of activities (e.g., shows, demonstrations, rides, races, competitions, site-seeing tours).

Whenever animals are on display or made to perform, they face risks to their physical and psychological well-being. Such risks concern the ways in which they are bred, raised, housed, trained and transported, as well as the activities themselves. For instance:

- In zoos, large carnivores such as grizzly and black bears are susceptible to developing pacing stereotypies. Pacing in bears is thought to be related to the naturally wide-ranging, far-travelling lifestyle they have in the wild – a lifestyle which the captive environment is simply unable to accommodate. On average, zoo enclosures are hundreds of thousands times smaller than the minimum home range of a grizzly or black bear.
- When animals such as horses are used for site-seeing tours, they face – among other challenges – extreme weather conditions, of which heat stress is only one example. Carriage rides are typically purchased by tourists, and tourists tend to travel during the summer months when temperatures are high. Horses pulling heavy loads on hot

pavement are at risk of overheating, which may be exacerbated by high humidity, as well as infrequent watering, poor access to electrolytes, obesity, poor conditioning or illness.

- Racing animals such as greyhounds, who can accelerate to speeds of 65 kilometres per hour in a few seconds, are susceptible to injuries, including stress fractures of the metacarpals (front feet) and metatarsals (hind feet). Experts suggest that such fractures are due to the excessive loads borne by these bones while dogs negotiate the bends in counterclockwise tracks. Young or unfit greyhounds who start racing prematurely are especially disposed to these fractures.
- For circus animals such as elephants, performing or training typically takes up very little time. Consequently, they may be kept chained continuously for up to 23 hours a day. When chained, elephants can only move about a metre forwards and backwards – a severe restriction to say the least, considering that elephants in the wild normally travel up to 50 kilometres a day. Among other issues, elephants lacking physical exercise can become obese, which, in turn, leads to joint defects, as well as damaged feet and leg ligaments. Joint problems are then exacerbated when elephants are repeatedly made to assume unnatural positions during performances, particularly tricks that cause major strain such as standing on one leg.
- Highly social marine mammals such as dolphins and belugas routinely experience social stress in captivity. In the wild, dolphins and belugas live in fluid groups; individuals come and go, with some choosing to maintain strong, long-term relationships with one another. Captive dolphins and belugas, in contrast, are subject to social changes over which they have no control, such as what occurs when they are transferred between aquariums. Unsuitable groupings can lead to a high incidence of disease, aberrant and aggressive social behaviours, and poor success in calf rearing.

See also:

Animal Fighting

Animals in the Film and Television Industry

Circuses and Travelling Exhibitions

Falconry

Hunting

Rodeos

Sled Dogs

Sport Fishing

Trapping

Zoos and Aquariums

Background updated – January 2016

DEFINITIONS

Five Freedoms: The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of domesticated animals in human care. We acknowledge that

absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but we expect all animal guardians to strive to provide them. The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
3. Freedom from distress;
4. Freedom from discomfort;
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.