

Culpepper & Merriweather Circus

USDA License #73-C-0144, P.O. Box 813, Hugo, OK 74743

Culpepper & Merriweather Circus has failed to meet minimum federal standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cited Culpepper & Merriweather several times for failure to provide animals with shelter from the elements, enough space to make normal postural adjustments, and proper veterinary care. Culpepper & Merriweather had a tiger cub confiscated by the USDA, and its license was suspended for six months by an administrative law judge. Culpepper & Merriweather Circus features numerous wild and domestic animals. Contact PETA for documentation.

May 11, 2015: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for not having a current written program of veterinary care available for review at the time of the inspection.

December 20, 2011: According to a court docket, Administrative Law Judge Janice K. Bullard ordered a suspension of the USDA license held by Culpepper & Merriweather for a period of no less than six months. She also ordered the circus to cease and desist from further violations of the AWA. Bullard said that Culpepper & Merriweather “willfully failed to develop a plan of veterinary care, and further, willfully allowed the one surviving [tiger] cub of a litter of three to be hand-raised in a capricious manner that led to poor nutrition, which risked its development and health.” Furthermore, according to Bullard, Culpepper & Merriweather “demonstrated a shockingly cavalier attitude regarding the health and safety of animals that they owned.” She stated that the circus had no attending veterinarian, did not provide tiger cubs with adequate nutrition, and failed to provide a tiger cub with care and treatment for a wound on his nose.

March 21, 2011: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to have facilities constructed

and maintained in such a manner as to contain and protect the animals from injury. One lion and two tigers were kept in an arena where it would be possible for them to escape while waiting to perform or while being exercised.

August 16, 2008: According to a court docket, a tiger cub was confiscated from Culpepper & Merriweather because USDA inspectors and the USDA’s large-cat expert decided that the cab of the truck where the cub was kept was too hot, his container was too small, he was underweight because of an inappropriate diet, and his living conditions were unsanitary. The cub, Tubbs, was relocated to a USDA-approved facility. The veterinarian at this facility concluded that the cub had worn an ill-fitting harness that had caused skin abrasions, that he was underweight, and that he had sustained a wound near his right eye. (See August 14 and 15, 2008.)

August 15, 2008: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to correct previously identified violations of not providing the 3-month-old tiger cub identified during the previous day’s inspection with adequate veterinary care or an appropriate diet. Although the tiger cub had been examined by a veterinarian, the inspector wrote that the veterinarian “was not qualified to evaluate the animal due to lack of knowledge, experience, and training in the specialized medical, nutritional, and husbandry needs of big cats.” Culpepper & Merriweather was also cited for giving false information to USDA officials by continually denying the presence of the tiger cub on the premises.

August 14, 2008: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to provide a 3-month-old tiger cub, who was “thin with readily visible boney structures including his backbone and hips” and had “an unthrifty hair coat,” with veterinary care; for improper handling of the tiger cub, who was being housed in a dog crate in the bunk of a tractor trailer without air conditioning in temperatures of 89 degrees Fahrenheit and higher; for housing the tiger cub in a plastic dog crate that measured approximately 30 inches high, 20 inches wide, and 37 inches deep and did not provide sufficient space to allow the cub adequate freedom of movement; and for failure to provide the cub with an appropriate diet, which, the inspector wrote, “if continued will result in malnutrition, nutritional deficiencies, and/or medical problems.”

June 5, 2008: Two elephants were spooked when strong winds blew a large inflatable amusement slide toward them while preparing to perform with the Culpepper & Merriweather Circus in WaKeeney, Kansas. The animals escaped from their handler and ran through town, causing minor property damage and frightening residents. One woman claimed that

she had been chased into her garage. The elephants were pursued by police, sheriff's officers, firefighters, and circus workers. One elephant was shot three times with a tranquilizer gun in an effort by authorities to slow the animal down. The elephants were on the loose for approximately three hours before they were recaptured and loaded onto trucks.

May 12, 2008: According to a court docket, the second of three hand-raised tiger cubs born on May 3, 2008, died after refusing to eat and having multiple seizures. The cub died before Culpepper & Merriweather had the animal seen by a veterinarian for refusing to eat. The necropsy showed that the cause of death was a widespread *E. coli* infection and bacteria in the blood.

May 6, 2008: According to a court docket, the smallest of three tiger cubs born on May 3, 2008, died after Culpepper & Merriweather decided to hand-raise the animals. A necropsy was not performed on this cub to discover the exact cause of death.

May 3, 2008: According to a court docket, a female tiger named Delia delivered three cubs after she was not sufficiently prevented by Culpepper & Merriweather from mating with her male sibling, who was presumed to be the father of the cubs. Culpepper & Merriweather did not know that Delia was pregnant until about 10 days before she gave birth and did not have the potentially pregnant tiger examined by a veterinarian. After Delia pushed her cubs away, Culpepper & Merriweather decided the cubs would be hand-raised.

June 28, 2005: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for not having a complete diet plan for the big cats.

May 25, 2005: *The Dispatch* (a South Pierce County, Washington-based publication) reported that Culpepper & Merriweather's two African elephants, Barbara and Connie, died in January and February 2004 from an infection that causes inflammation of the heart and brain. According to the *African Elephant Studbook*, 22-year-old Barbara and 18-year-old Connie were both captured in Africa. In the wild, elephants can live to be 70.

February 14, 2005: A USDA report of an investigation claimed that Culpepper & Merriweather exhibited animals from a nonvalid site between March 22 and October 26, 2004, for a total of 219 performances.

January 6, 2005: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to correct a previously identified violation of not providing animals with adequate shelter from inclement weather. The

inspector noted that this was the second inspection conducted at the new location and that the facility was still out of compliance with the AWA.

June 4, 2004: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to provide animals with adequate shelter from the sun, for failure to provide three tigers with adequate shelter from inclement weather, and for not having a perimeter fence. The circus was also cited for a tiger-transport trailer that was structurally unsound and needed additional ventilation. One tiger was housed in a transport cage, and two others were in a cage with "a solid floor of mud."

April 16, 2002: According to *The Arizona Daily Star*, Culpepper & Merriweather was fined \$6,400 for an April 2000 incident in which two elephants and several farmed animals escaped while touring in California.

March 14, 2002: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to maintain the structural strength of a transport trailer in a manner that would contain the animals and protect them from injury.

October 31, 2001: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to provide an elephant in need of foot care with adequate veterinary care, failure to maintain the structural strength of perimeter fencing, failure to have an adequate perimeter fence to contain potentially dangerous animals, and failure to maintain the structural strength of the elephant-transport trailer.

May 13, 2000: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to correct previously identified violations of mishandling of elephants by inexperienced handlers and failure to have a complete veterinary-care program. The inspector wrote, "Elephants must be taken off exhibit and away from any potential public contact until licensee can finish demonstrating that [it has] at least two qualified elephant handlers."

May 10, 2000: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to correct previously identified violations of mishandling of elephants by inexperienced handlers, failure to have a complete veterinary-care program, failure to submit the required itinerary, and failure to provide goats, llamas, and a pig with minimum space in a transport trailer. The inspector wrote, "Elephants must be taken off exhibit and away from any potential public contact until licensee can demonstrate that they have at least two qualified elephant handlers."

May 8, 2000: The USDA cited Culpepper &

Merriweather for failure to correct previously identified violations of mishandling of elephants by inexperienced handlers, failure to provide a camel with minimum space, failure to have a complete veterinary-care program, and failure to submit the required itinerary. The circus was also cited for failure to provide an elephant, who was tightly shackled on short chains, with minimum space and failure to have sufficiently trained employees. The inspector wrote, "Farm animals and camel were not watered until approximately two hours after unloading. ... The elephants were able to partly tear down the canopy while no employees were present. A scrape over Connie's (elephant's) left eye was not noted until pointed out by the inspector. ... Employees were ... not in a position to ensure elephants are protected from unauthorized access. An incident occurred while the circus was exhibiting in Fillmore, Calif., several weeks previously. Per the Animal Control officer present, the farm animals escaped unnoticed from the transport trailer and the two llamas ended up on a busy highway."

April 26 and 28, 2000: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to correct previously identified violations of not having a complete veterinary-care program and failure to contain a goat who was observed climbing out of an enclosure. The circus was also cited for mishandling elephants after the April 20 escape of two elephants. The inspector wrote, "Incident appears to have resulted from a lack of sufficient qualified elephant handlers." The circus was cited for failure to have an attendant present during periods of public contact with "petting zoo" animals, failure to provide a camel with adequate space and exercise, failure to submit the required itinerary, and failure to provide goats, llamas, and a pig with minimum space in a transport trailer.

April 20, 2000: Two elephants escaped while the circus was in Yucca Valley, California. One elephant stomped on a circus worker, and the other frightened citizens as she wandered through the city.

April 20, 1999: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failing to meet the "general requirements" of the federal AWA when animals were found loose. The inspector also observed that camels were lying on the ground, extending their heads and necks out from the enclosure in an effort to graze. The bottom rails of the enclosures had sharp ends, which presented a hazard to the animals when they pulled their heads back into the enclosure.

December 22, 1998: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather Circus for failure to provide elephants with veterinary care. They had a buildup of necrotic skin, which occurs in captive elephants because of

poor husbandry practices. Without access to water and abrasive materials (e.g., sand, rocks, and trees), elephants are not able to remove dead skin. In captivity, caretakers should wash elephants daily to maintain healthy skin.

August 13, 1998: The USDA cited the circus for problems with its transport trailer. The inspector also noted that Barbara, an African elephant, had dead skin on her forehead and above her eyes. Approximately 50 percent of her facial area was affected.

July 14, 1998: The USDA found that the circus's veterinary program had not been updated in more than a year. Both elephants had necrotic skin on their faces and heads.

March 28, 1998: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for inadequate barriers to protect both the animals and the public. The circus was using a cloth banner to separate the animals from the public. The USDA also cited the circus for noncompliance with the AWA's minimum standards for veterinary care. The program for veterinary care had not been updated, and one elephant was in need of foot care. Elephants in captivity are highly susceptible to a potentially life-threatening condition called "foot rot," which occurs as a result of standing on hard surfaces, standing in their own excrement, and lack of foot care. The inspector also noted that necrotic skin was present on the elephant's face and head.

November 13, 1997: The USDA cited the circus for failing to comply with the AWA's minimum standards for veterinary care. One goat's hooves had grown out excessively and needed to be trimmed. Both of the circus's elephants had a buildup of necrotic skin on their faces and heads.

January 14, 1997: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failing to provide shelter and adequate space. At the time of the inspection, there was a heavy rain, and five animals had no access to shelter.

June 10, 1996: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failing to comply with the AWA's minimum standards for veterinary care.

March 27, 1996: The USDA cited the circus for failing to comply with the AWA's minimum standards for veterinary care as well as for a transport enclosure and primary conveyance in need of repair.

December 5, 1995: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to have an updated program of veterinary care, failure to provide a goat in need of

hoof trimming with veterinary care, failure to have a written exercise program, and failure to maintain records of acquisition for animals, including a young zebra who had died. The inspector also noted that one elephant was in need of foot trimming and that another had an open, draining cyst on her trunk.

December 29, 1994: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for inadequate drainage in the elephant yard and failure to maintain the barn.

July 7, 1994: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to provide a camel, who had an enlarged right front foot, with veterinary care. There were no medical records to indicate that a veterinarian had examined the camel or had given approval for the animal to be used in the show.

January 14, 1994: The circus was cited for failing to keep proper records regarding the animals.

September 11, 1993: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failure to keep and maintain records for the animals, failure to provide the animals with an adequate enclosure, and failure to maintain a transport enclosure that would prevent injury to the animals.

December 1, 1992: The USDA found Culpepper & Merriweather in violation of the AWA for failing to provide the animals with shade.

September 30, 1992: The USDA stated in a letter to Culpepper & Merriweather, “[I]t was noted that you had not corrected two recurring noncompliances concerning the lack of adequate shelter for your elephant and the lack of primary enclosure fences. You are now in violation of Sections 3.127 (a) and (b).”

September 8, 1992: The USDA cited Culpepper & Merriweather for failing to meet AWA standards.

June 15, 1991: The USDA found Culpepper & Merriweather in violation of the AWA for “lack of shade in winter quarters for elephant.”