



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Elephant Escape From Circus Spurs Federal Complaint
In Defense of Animals urges action to protect elephant and public from harm

San Rafael, Calif. – In Defense of Animals (IDA) filed a complaint today with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) over an incident in which an elephant named Viola temporarily escaped from the Cole Bros. Circus in Lynchburg, Virginia, and was injured after a fall.

“In Defense of Animals is calling on the USDA to immediately bar Cole Bros. Circus from using Viola for performances or giving rides until this matter can be fully investigated and her health status evaluated,” said Catherine Doyle, IDA elephant campaign director. “It is a matter of both public safety and animal welfare. The USDA should not allow such an easily startled elephant to perform or be in contact with the public as she is likely to escape again, with potentially disastrous consequences.”

Viola reportedly was startled by a rabbit and ran past customers waiting to purchase tickets on Tuesday evening, ignoring her handler’s commands. She was completely out of control and it is just luck that no people were injured or killed. Viola fell down a steep embankment and injured her shoulder and foot. It took nearly 30 minutes to bring her back under control.

Such events are not rare. Last fall, an elephant with a history of breaking loose escaped her handlers and was struck and injured by an SUV. Just a few weeks ago, an elephant killed her handler at a Pennsylvania Shrine Circus. Since 1990, at least 14 human deaths and more than 120 human injuries have been attributed to elephants.

In one incident shown on television worldwide, the elephant Tyke, while performing for a circus in Hawaii, killed her trainer and gored her groomer before hundreds of horrified spectators. Tyke bolted from the arena and ran through city streets for more than thirty minutes. Police fired 86 shots at Tyke, who eventually collapsed and died. A similar incident occurred at a circus in Palm Bay, Florida, involving the elephant Janet, who was carrying people on her back at the time. Viola is also used to give rides.

“Elephants performing and giving rides in the circus are wild animals under incredible stress due to brutal training and harsh, completely unnatural living conditions,” said Doyle. “This dangerous incident is yet another reminder of why elephants should not be in circuses.”

Though elephants in the wild walk miles a day, in circuses they spend their lives in chains and the tight confinement of trucks and trains while transported around the country. Training is violent, relying on fear and physical punishment imposed with the bullhook, a steel-tipped weapon similar to a fireplace poker that is used to prod, stab, strike and threaten elephants.

The Cole Bros. Circus will perform next in Winchester, Virginia.

A copy of IDA’s complaint to the USDA is available upon request. For more information, visit www.HelpElephants.com.

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In Defense of Animals is an international animal protection organization located in San Rafael, Calif. dedicated to protecting animals’ rights, welfare, and habitat through education, outreach, and our hands-on rescue facilities in Mumbai, India, Cameroon, Africa, and rural Mississippi.