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**In Defense of Animals Urges Feds to Investigate Elephant Death at Southwick's Zoo
Zoo urged to publicly release Dondi's veterinary records**

San Rafael, Calif. (July 29, 2010) – In Defense of Animals (IDA) today filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), urging an investigation into the death of Dondi, an Asian elephant held at the Southwick's Zoo in Mendon, Massachusetts. Dondi died on Wednesday, after suffering an unidentified illness.

“Dondi's unexpected death raises a red flag because at age 36 she should have been in the prime of life,” said Catherine Doyle, IDA Elephant Campaign director. “We are asking the USDA to investigate the circumstances surrounding Dondi's death as a matter of public interest and public safety.”

In a separate letter sent to Southwick's Zoo president Justine Brewer, IDA urged the zoo to publicly release Dondi's veterinary records and necropsy reports, saying, “The public has a right to know the cause of Dondi's death.”

Dondi was in direct contact with the public at the Southwick's Zoo, where she gave rides during the summer months; she performed circus tricks and gave rides during the winter at various locations in Florida. Elephants can harbor diseases transmissible to humans, including tuberculosis, which can be difficult to detect. Release of the records would hopefully allay any public health concerns.

IDA further appealed to the zoo to not replace Dondi with another elephant as the zoo's tiny exhibit fails to meet elephants' needs. “Though the zoo may have been well-intentioned, Dondi led a sad and unnatural life for an elephant,” wrote Doyle. “She was trucked across the country, confined in cramped pens, forced to perform circus tricks and give rides, and lived without the companionship of another elephant.”

Elephants are highly social animals who, in the wild, live in large family groups in which females remain with their mothers for life. Asian elephants have a natural lifespan of 60-70 years. Recent scientific studies show that elephants in zoos die decades earlier than those in relatively protected wild populations.

Intensive confinement in small zoo pens often leads to serious physical and psychological problems, including painful foot disease and arthritis that cripple elephants and lead to premature death, infertility, high stillbirth rates, and repetitive rocking and swaying, signs of psychological distress.

Copies of IDA's letters to the USDA and the Southwick's Zoo are available upon request. For more information, visit www.HelpElephants.com.

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