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## Philadelphia elephants mistreated in W. Pa., activists say

By Luke Harold  
Inquirer Staff Writer

A small squad of animal-rights activists gathered at City Hall early this afternoon to publicize their concern for two Philadelphia Zoo elephants now housed at a facility outside Pittsburgh.

The Friends of Philly Zoo Elephants filed a formal complaint Tuesday with the U.S. Department of Agriculture over the allegedly inhumane living conditions for Kallie and Bette at the International Conservation Center in Somerset, Pa.

The two, along with a bull elephant named Jackson owned by the Pittsburgh Zoo, suffer from water restrictions, a lack of stimulating activities, and prolonged periods of confinement in a cement barn, the complaint says.

At City Hall, four members of the five-year-old group handed out fliers near a table with signs and two stuffed toy elephants.

"The overwhelming majority of people have no clue what's going on, and they're shocked to learn the facts about the elephants," said Marianne Bessey, an attorney and FPZE's volunteer director. "We're getting a lot of people who are concerned."

"These are beautiful creatures that deserve to be treated humanely and with respect," said Amy Somers, an attorney who recently joined the group.

The group included video to support its charges that the elephants experienced stress and discomfort in violation of the Animal Welfare Act.

The animals had better living conditions at the Philadelphia Zoo, the group contends, even though the zoo said the transfer in July 2009 would improve the elephants' lives.

"We did what we thought was right for the animals," Vikram Dewan, the zoo's chief executive officer, said shortly after the move. "This place is already a great home for them, and we have the opportunity to work with a world-renowned staff with a real commitment to elephants."

Part of the complaint is that the elephants are confined to a 3.5-acre area, without access to the rest of the center's 724 acres.

The USDA received the complaint today, and an inspector will be sent to the center to check out the allegations, according to agency spokesman Dave Sacks. A fuller investigation could follow, he said.

Calls requesting comment from the Philadelphia Zoo were not immediately returned.

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