

Statement by Gary Kuehn, former L.A. Zoo Veterinarian

My name is Gary Kuehn. I was a veterinarian at the zoo for 23 years, beginning in 1974.

Medical problems were common in the elephants, usually the problems involved their feet. Some of these problems lasted for decades, until the elephants died of complications, such as Gita in 2006.

Effective treatment is essentially impossible, due to the nature of the small pens. These problems occur largely because the elephants are forced to live on hard surfaces, to which their soft feet are not adapted.

Lack of sufficient exercise due to small enclosures also contributes to foot problems, as well as to generalized arthritis, digestive problems, and social problems.

Isolation of elephants, which are highly social animals, can lead to serious emotional problems, such boredom and the excessive swaying and head bobbing that Billy exhibits every day.

My understanding is that the new yards would individually be about the same size as the old ones, and composed of the same substrate. This would simply perpetuate the same old problems, more unnecessary suffering and deaths.

Los Angeles has proven over several decades that keeping elephants properly is simply not possible at the current location; there just isn't enough space to do what needs to be done. While the average lifespan of an elephant in captivity is about 40 years, many of these elephants do not reach even half of that lifespan because of these ailments.

I urge you to cancel the new exhibit, and allow the elephants to be transferred to a sanctuary where appropriate resources are available.