

Maximizing Occupational Safety of Elephant Care Professionals At AZA-accredited and AZA-certified Facilities

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) continually strives to advance the occupational safety of elephant care professionals¹ as well as the care and welfare of elephants. Through a series of AZA actions over the past two decades, AZA has attempted to promote significant improvements in safety, care and welfare. Among other things, AZA has developed a Principles of Elephant Management training course and has adopted minimum Standards for Elephant Management and Care, which were made mandatory in 2001. These Principles and Standards have assisted AZA entities and organizations in developing sound practices regarding elephant care professionals.

In January 2011, the AZA Board of Directors initiated another review of the occupational safety of elephant care professionals. As part of this review, the AZA convened a special meeting in May 2011 of all directors of AZA facilities² with elephants and their elephant managers to discuss occupational safety in elephant care and management. While every facility is as different as are their elephants, a number of factors emerged from this discussion that have and will continue to increase workplace safety and reduce occupational risk, including adherence to high standards, increased staff training, well-developed management communications and protocols, and frequent program evaluation.

Concurrent with this review, in March 2011, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Board of Directors adopted revised Accreditation Standards for Elephant Management and Care³. These are comprehensive, performance-based standards that were developed over several years.

The above-listed safety measures notwithstanding, preliminary information suggests that the amount of time (both frequency and duration) an elephant care professional spends with an elephant in the same unrestricted space increases occupational risk⁴. Therefore the Board of Directors is taking the following measures to maximize the safety of elephant care staff, while continuing to advance the care and welfare of elephants.

As soon as possible and no later than September 1, 2014, elephant care providers at AZA facilities with elephants shall not share the same unrestricted space with elephants, except for in certain, well-defined circumstances outlined in II.d below.

The Board recognizes that, in order to achieve the above-stated goal, a transition period will be necessary. This transition period is sequenced to encompass:

- Additional work from the AZA Elephant Taxonomic Advisory Group (TAG) to support AZA facilities in safely managing elephants and providing advanced care and welfare;
- Program safety assessments;
- Immediate steps regarding the management of aggressive elephants;
- Program planning and documentation;
- Staff training; and
- Facilities/infrastructure changes.

The Board:

- I. Tasks the AZA Elephant Taxonomic Advisory Group (TAG) with the following:
 - a. By September 1, 2012, to provide guidance to institutions on elephant aggression in the form of a widely applicable scale/index, so that there is consistent understanding and implementation of item II.a. below;
 - b. By September 1, 2012, to develop standardized methods and protocols for AZA facilities to

- maintain daily behavioral profiles/ethograms for each elephant and document all instances of aggression⁵ to be applied in item II.e. below;
- c. By September 1, 2012, to develop an appendix to this document that provides guidance and examples to AZA facilities making modification to their infrastructure to accommodate this change in policy (see item II.i. below).
 - d. By September 1, 2012, to develop standardized methods and protocols for AZA facilities to report annually on:
 - 1. The circumstances in which elephant care professionals share unrestricted space with elephants versus when barriers and/or restraints are present (see item II.d.).
 - 2. The number of workplace injuries or fatalities, if any, that occurred in the care and management of elephants and the specific conditions under which each occurred.
 - 3. The number of elephant births and mortalities and a description of the specific practices and protocols used during each event.
 - e. By January 1, 2013, to develop standardized methods and protocols for AZA facilities to evaluate and maintain records of each elephant care professional's safety-proficiency, in a manner that integrates their experience level with the specific behavioral profiles of the elephants in his/her care (to be applied in II.g. below).
 - f. Convene a task force to research means of successful breeding, health care and welfare that will be increasingly effective with barriers in place between elephant care professionals and elephants.
- II. Directs all AZA facilities with elephants in their care to:
- a. As soon as possible, move any elephant that displays aggression (see item I.a. above) towards an elephant care provider(s) into management and care with barriers or restraints in place between that elephant and that care provider(s).
 - b. By January 1, 2012, perform at least one of the semi-annual program safety assessments, as outlined in AZA Elephant Standard 1.4.9.5.
 - c. By January 1, 2012, specifically address the facility's elephant program in the risk management policy required in AZA Accreditation Standard 11.4.1.
 - d. By September 1, 2012, amend their existing elephant management plans to include clear protocols for the frequency and duration when elephant care professionals and elephants may share the same unrestricted space⁶ for the specific purposes of required⁷ health and welfare procedures, transport, research, active breeding and calf management programs, and medical treatments and testing.
 - e. By January 1, 2013, maintain daily behavioral profiles/ethograms for each elephant and document all instances of aggression.
 - f. By January 1, 2013 provide a report (required annually) to the Accreditation Commission, the Elephant TAG, and the AZA staff that, for the previous year, defines:
 - 1. The circumstances under which elephant care professionals share unrestricted space with elephants versus when barriers and/or restraints are in place.
 - 2. The number of workplace injuries or fatalities, if any, that occurred in the care and management of elephants and the specific conditions under which each occurred.
 - 3. The number of elephant births and mortalities and a description of the specific practices and protocols used during each event.
 - g. By June 1, 2013, evaluate and maintain records of each elephant care professional's safety-proficiency, in a manner that integrates their experience level with the specific behavioral profiles of the elephants in his/her care.
 - h. By September 1, 2013, train their elephant care professionals to manage and care for elephants with barriers and/or restraints in place that provide employee safety.
 - i. By September 1, 2014, have put in place and implemented use of adequate infrastructure to manage and care for elephants with barriers and/or restraints in place that provide

employee safety.

- j. By September 1, 2014, if a facility cannot meet the infrastructure standard (see item II.i. above), it must apply for a variance. Before the variance can be issued by the Accreditation Commission the facility must describe to the Commission its plan to meet the standard. No variances will be granted after January 1, 2016.

III. Tasks the Professional Development Committee to:

- a. By September 1, 2012, update the Principles of Elephant Management-I course curriculum, which shall include mechanisms to:
 1. Manage and care for elephants with barriers and/or restraints in place.
 2. Minimize the frequency and duration elephant care professionals share unrestricted space with elephants subject to the exceptions outlined in item II.d. above.
 3. Develop and maintain detailed elephant behavioral profiles/ethograms.All elephant care professionals⁸, managers and directors of AZA facilities with elephants will complete by November 2016.
- b. By September 1, 2013, create and deliver a series of online elephant training modules on subjects including: safety, elephant record keeping, behavioral profiling and developing and maintaining elephant ethograms, positive operant conditioning, assessment of elephant aggression, and assessment of personal safety-proficiency. All elephant care professionals will complete by June 2014.
- c. By September 2013, create a facilities-based Principles of Elephant Management-II course curriculum, which includes experience with managing live elephants with the use of barriers and restraints and the application of advanced principles of elephant management, care, welfare, and occupational safety. All elephant managers will complete by November 2016.

¹ The term "elephant care professionals" includes all who provide for the care and welfare of elephants including veterinary care and other health care providers.

² In this document the term "AZA facilities" refers to all AZA-accredited and AZA-certified Related Facilities.

³ References to "elephant standards" refer to "AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care" as approved by the AZA Board of Directors in March 2011.

⁴ The Board understands that non-AZA entities and organizations may assess and address these risks in a different manner, and the policies adopted herein are only intended to be applied to AZA facilities.

⁵ This is an expansion of Elephant Standards: 2.2.1.9 (Daily and life stage variation in patterns of social affiliation, which requires that a behavioral profile must be maintained for each individual elephant and updated annually); 3.3.2.1 (Daily Care, which requires that all elephants must be visually inspected on a daily basis); and, 5.2 (Animal and Keeper Safety, which encourages that a record of all elephant-related keeper injuries or aggression directed at keepers should be kept, and related keeper injuries or aggression directed at keepers, and elephant behavioral profiles should be reviewed annually.).

⁶ This is an expansion of Elephant Standard 4.1.1 Training Methods.

⁷ The word "required" is intended, first, to allow for a degree of flexibility, recognizing the wide array of conditions that occur in managing animals and, second, to indicate that a decision to engage in any of the specific exceptions (i.e. in which elephant care professionals and elephants may share the same unrestricted space. See: II.d.) should involve more than a single individual and must be approved by the facility director.

⁸ Veterinary staff are encouraged but not required to complete this course. Elephant managers who have already completed PEM-I will not be required to re-take the course but will be required to complete the online elephant training modules outlined in III.b.