



## **PETA** Factsheet

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### **Amazing Animal Productions (Sidney Yost)**

USDA License #93-C-0590, 2065 W. College Ave., Apt. 200, San Bernardino, CA 92407

**Amazing Animal Productions (formerly known as Amazing Animal Actors) has failed to meet minimal federal standards for the care of animals used in exhibitions as established in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to have an adequate environmental enhancement plan to promote the psychological well-being of primates, failure to provide adequate space, exhibiting animals without a valid USDA license, and failure to handle chimpanzees safely. A primatologist who investigated Amazing Animal Productions witnessed chimpanzees who were being beaten in order to make them obedient. Amazing Animal Productions' chimpanzees have attacked and bitten at least two children. Sid Yost was fined and incarcerated for possessing a prohibited species in violation of California state law. A federal grand jury charged Sid Yost with fraud and making false statements in a bankruptcy-related indictment. Contact PETA for documentation.**

**October 21, 2009:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to correct a previously identified noncompliance of failing to handle animals in a manner that would ensure minimal risk of harm to the animal and the public because the facility continued to offer public encounters with animals, including big cats. Amazing Animal Productions was also cited for a number of additional noncompliances, including the following: failure to provide veterinary care to a Great Pyrenees dog who was matted to such an extent that the inspector determined that the health of the animal could be affected; failure to provide shelter with sufficient space for hybrid puppies to sit, stand, and lie in a normal manner; failure to maintain a wood shelter box for hybrids Dakota and Sierra (the box was chewed to the extent that screws were exposed, posing a risk of injury to the animals); failure to provide a tether arrangement that would adequately contain an adult cougar (the clasps on the tether had no locking mechanism, and the tether was in an area without a perimeter fence); failure to provide a perimeter fence around a chain-link mesh enclosure intended for a cougar; failure to provide ferrets with sufficient space for adequate freedom of movement; and failure to maintain records documenting a proper inventory of all animals at the facility. The USDA inspector noted that Amazing Animal Productions did not have the necessary state permits to possess a fox, five ferrets, and a prairie dog nor the necessary county permit to house a cougar on the property. It was also noted that Amazing Animal Productions provided false information to the USDA regarding the fox by claiming that someone else held the state permit for the animal.

**June 10, 2009:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for failing to handle animals in a manner that would ensure minimal risk of harm to the animal and the public during "Animal Workshops," "Animal Clinics," private events, and photo-ops in which members of the public were allowed to have direct contact with animals, including big cats. The USDA also cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to provide adequate enclosures and sufficient space to wolf hybrids who were housed in airline transport crates; failure to properly store fruit (which was intended to be fed to the animals), some of which was overripe and had flies on it; failure to provide adequate sanitation in the kitchen area, which was filthy with dirt and food debris and contaminated with flies and mouse droppings; and failure to notify the USDA of a new location housing animals.

**April 9, 2009:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for failing to handle animals in a manner that would ensure minimal risk of harm to the animal and the public during the April 4, 2009, appearance at Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Resort. At that event, a wolf hybrid attacked and injured a 2½-year-old girl. The wolf hybrid was subsequently

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euthanized. The USDA also cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to provide current health certificates for two wolf hybrids (including the animal who attacked the girl), a monkey, and two dogs as well as for failure to provide records of acquisition and disposition for three ferrets, two pigs, and a red fox.

**April 4, 2009:** According to news reports, a 2½-year-old girl was attacked by a wolf hybrid who was being displayed by Amazing Animal Productions at Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Resort in Utica, Illinois. As the leashed wolf—who weighed approximately 100 pounds—was led through a curtain and onto a stage, the animal reportedly lunged at the girl, biting numerous parts of her body, including her face and neck. The girl was taken by ambulance to a hospital. The wolf hybrid was euthanized, and the girl's parents subsequently filed lawsuits against Grand Bear Resort and Amazing Animal Productions.

**March 18, 2008:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for unsafe handling of a lion during an appearance on *The Tonight Show*. The report states, "Licensee exhibited a 7½-month-old lion on a leash in the presence of the general public, during a taping of *The Tonight Show*. A leash does not constitute a barrier, and there is a risk to the safety of the public when a leash is the only restraint in use." Amazing Animal Productions was also cited for failing to provide adequate space to a lynx who was in an enclosure of "inadequate size and design." The inspector wrote that the enclosure did not allow the lynx to make "normal postural adjustments, such as standing on rear feet" and that the animal was "showing signs of stress, such as constant pacing." The USDA also cited Amazing Animal Productions for a number of other noncompliances, including the following: failure to provide adequate shelter to a squirrel whose only protection from the cold was a ventilated airline crate; failure to provide a sufficient perimeter fence around a tiger enclosure, a red fox enclosure, and a capuchin monkey enclosure to prevent people and animals outside the fence from having contact with the animals inside; failure to provide food in a manner that ensures that the food remains uncontaminated and that animals receive necessary nutrients; failure to provide adequate sanitation in a squirrel enclosure that had an accumulation of food debris and excreta and a capuchin monkey enclosure with a buildup of food debris; and housing a rabbit and a primate in the same primary enclosure.

**August 29, 2006:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to correct a previously identified noncompliance of not providing handles or handholds on a chimpanzee transport enclosure in order to allow the enclosure to be moved easily in case of emergency. Amazing Animal Productions was also cited for failure to provide adequate veterinary care when it could not provide documentation that a 6-year-old chimpanzee named Cody was receiving the preventive care prescribed in the facility's written program of veterinary care. The inspector wrote, "With a primate, such as this chimpanzee, many bacteria, viruses, and parasites can be shared with human beings and vice versa. This chimp is used in exhibition work [in which] it interacts [with] and touches human beings. Therefore, preventative vaccinations and appropriate diagnostic testing ... are essential for the protection of both the chimp and the humans." Amazing Animal Productions was also cited for failure to provide adequate environmental enhancement to a chimpanzee who was housed in isolation while traveling for several days at a time. The inspector wrote, "Chimpanzees are typically very active, social animals. Isolation from the rest of the troop for several days can be detrimental to their well-being, especially when housed in the much smaller primary enclosure ...."

**August 14, 2006:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to provide an adequately ventilated enclosure to transport chimpanzees, failure to maintain a current written program of veterinary care, failure to provide a permanent primary enclosure for a tethered dog, and failure to provide a veterinarian-approved environmental enhancement plan for primates.

**July 12, 2005:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to provide environmental enhancement to promote the psychological well-being of nonhuman primates. It was unclear if modifications to the environmental enrichment plan had been approved by the veterinarian, and the schedule that was provided during the inspection did not reflect the actual enrichment that was being provided to the animals. The inspector wrote, "Documentation of enrichment is spotty. The daily log does not contain enrichment information for approximately 40% of the days."

**October 24, 2004:** A USDA spokesperson told the *Los Angeles Daily News* that the agency is investigating Yost for alleged violations of the Animal Welfare Act.

**March 3, 2004:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Productions for failure to properly handle dangerous animals who are used for public exhibition. The inspector wrote, "There is no documentation of the knowledge and experience of [the] employees to allow for the determination that they have sufficient knowledge and experience to ensure the safety of the animals and the public." The inspector also notified Amazing Animal Productions that it was prohibited

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from using a chimpanzee with a documented history of biting as well as two large adult exotic cats in situations involving potential public contact.

**October 14, 2003:** The Chimpanzee Collaboratory released a report detailing the findings of a 14-month undercover investigation conducted at Amazing Animal Actors. Investigator Sarah Baeckler, who has a master's degree in primatology and an undergraduate degree in primate behavior and anthropology, revealed systematic abuse that caused pain and suffering, including the following:

- Chimpanzees lived in cages that measured only 10 feet square and 8 feet tall.
- Young animals were beaten in order to break their spirits and make them submissive.
- Chimpanzees became fearful, rigid, and withdrawn when trainers approached, and they screamed and whimpered during abusive training sessions.
- Over a period of several months, a 3-year-old chimpanzee named Sable was punched in the back and kicked in the head, and several objects, including a rock, a mallet, and a broom handle, were thrown at her.
- A 3-year-old chimpanzee named Cody was grabbed and yanked by the ear until he screamed in pain in an attempt to force him to stand. He was also grabbed by his lower lip, pulled forward, and pushed down to make him lie on his back. On other occasions, Cody was hit on the head with a lock, punched in the back, kicked in the head, and hit with stick.
- A 4-year-old chimpanzee named Apollo was viciously beaten with fists and a broom handle.

Ms. Baeckler stated, "[I]t is naïve to assume that chimpanzees can be compelled to perform complex tricks with simple positive reinforcement such as a jellybean or other treat. ... The tricks are just too complex, and the rewards are just too small to hold their interest. The plain truth is this: the only thing that will make them stop behaving like curious, rambunctious chimpanzees and, instead, routinely perform mundane tasks over and over again on cue is *abject fear of physical pain.*"

**2003:** Sid Yost entered a plea of no contest to one count of possessing a prohibited species (a bear) in violation of the California Regulatory Code and in direct violation of the probation term issued in 2002. Yost was sentenced to 20 days actual time in a Ventura County jail with an approved work-release program, placed on three years of probation, and fined \$1,600.

**2002:** Sid Yost pleaded no contest to a charge of illegal possession of a lion cub. The lion cub was confiscated by the California Department of Fish and Game, and Yost was fined \$1,000 and put on three years' probation.

**September 19, 2002:** According to *Consumer Bankruptcy News*, "A federal grand jury in Orlando, Florida, charged Sidney Yost with one count of fraudulently concealing assets in bankruptcy and two counts of making false statements. According to the indictment, Yost's bankruptcy schedules did not disclose that he was the sole shareholder and director of Amazing Animal Actors Corp. and Amazing Animal Affection Training Center Corp. The indictment also alleges that Yost failed to list his ownership of several exotic animals kept at the center."

**July 24, 2001:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Actors for failure to handle chimpanzees in a way that minimizes the risk of harm to the animals and the public and for failure to provide the required itinerary to enable an animal welfare inspection for animals used in filming. The inspector wrote, "Both chimps exhibited by licensee have documented incidents of biting members of the public. The older chimp in Tennessee in 2000 and the younger chimp in Simi Valley, [California], in April 2001. The fact that bites occurred indicates that exhibition was not done in such a way as to minimize risk to the public and demonstrates a violation of regulations." The inspector also noted that violations identified during a July 17, 2001, inspection had not been corrected.

**July 17, 2001:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Actors for failure to correct a previously identified noncompliance of not providing minimum space to chimpanzees stored in a transport vehicle. Amazing Animal Actors was also cited for failure to have an adequate environmental enhancement plan to promote the psychological well-being of primates and failure to provide primates with a veterinarian-approved diet.

**April 22, 2001:** According to a Ventura County Animal Bite Record, a 2½-year-old male chimpanzee named Mr. P belonging to Sid Yost was ordered to be quarantined for 30 days after lunging at and biting a 12-year-old boy on the left hand.

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**September 21, 2000:** A State of California Restricted Species Permit indicates that Sid Yost obtained a tiger, a Kodiak bear, a lemur, a lynx, and a serval from Stump Hill Farm, a substandard facility in Ohio. The USDA has cited Stump Hill Farm for failure to provide veterinary care, failure to provide environmental enrichment and minimum space, failure to provide shelter, and filthy cages. Stump Hill Farm prematurely removes infant animals from their mothers for commercial purposes.

**September 12, 2000:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Actors for failure to have a complete program of veterinary care, failure to provide minimum space to chimpanzees stored in a transport vehicle, and failure to have adequate ventilation in a shipping container for a chimpanzee.

**April 9, 2000:** Sid Yost (also known as Ranger Rick Kelly) took a chimpanzee named Angel to a Blockbuster Video in Franklin, Tennessee, to take part in photo-ops and to promote a Critter Gitter movie. Angel fiercely bit a 9-year-old girl on the hand after posing for a photograph. The girl's hand swelled and required stitches. Yost left the state before the chimpanzee could be quarantined and was issued a citation for violating Tennessee's exotic animal law. Yost failed to appear in court and never paid the fine. The girl's parents filed a \$50,000 lawsuit against Yost, Critter Gitters, and Blockbuster, claiming that the defendants should have been aware of the danger inherent in subjecting Angel to a crowded area with so many children. None of the parties named in the lawsuit offered to pay for medical expenses. The USDA fined Yost \$2,000 for AWA violations associated with this attack.

**November 19, 1999:** In a U.S. Bankruptcy Court judgment, Yost was ordered to pay \$20,000 plus interest to settle a bankruptcy proceeding related to his Lifestyles Vacation Travel Club (see May 18, 1997).

**June 18, 1999:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Actors for failure to have a program of veterinary care, failure to provide documentation of experience and qualifications to exhibit animals to the public in direct-contact situations, and failure to have an environmental enhancement program to promote the psychological well-being of primates.

**March 1999:** A chimpanzee named Rocky, made famous when Jack Hanna displayed him on *The Late Show With David Letterman* in February 1998, was sold at an auction with more than two dozen other exotic animals, including bears and big cats. The animals were auctioned to pay creditors after owner Sid Yost declared bankruptcy.

**August 1, 1998:** The USDA cited Amazing Animal Actors for exhibiting a chimpanzee at Gatorland Zoo in Florida without a valid USDA exhibitor license. The inspector wrote, "Mr. Yost has had a pre-license inspection in July 1997 and did not complete the requirements for licensing at that time."

**May 18, 1997:** According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, Sid Yost co-owned a travel agency called Lifestyles Vacation Travel Club, which took money from people planning vacations then failed to pay for their reservations and vanished with the money. A travel agent who worked with Lifestyles reported that 50 or more clients were duped.

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