

# Shrine Circuses

Shrine circuses don't possess their own animal exhibitor licenses from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), so they're not subject to citations under the name "Shrine Circus." Each local Shrine chapter contracts with an outside company—including Tarzan Zerbini Circus,\* Carden Circus International,\* Jordan World Circus,\* Royal Hanneford Circus,\* Franzen Bros. Circus,\* Circus Hollywood,\* Circus United, James Cristy Cole Circus, Carson & Barnes Circus,\* Hamid Circus, and Cindy Migley Productions—to produce the circus. The producers then hire animal acts from exhibitors such as the Hawthorn Corporation,\* Have Trunk Will Travel, Mitchel Kalmanson,\* Liebel Family Circus,\* Jennifer Caudill, and more. Each Shrine temple produces its own circus, so animal exhibits will vary from temple to temple and from year to year. Exhibitors of leased animals at Shrine circuses have failed to meet minimum federal standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The USDA has cited Shrine circus exhibitors for failing to provide veterinary care, adequate shelter from the elements, nutritious food, and clean water. Exhibitors have also been cited for failing to handle animals in a manner that prevents trauma and harm to the animals and ensures public safety. Animals used by Shrine circuses have killed and injured people. Contact PETA for documentation.

\*Factsheet available

**April 4, 2017:** The USDA cited big-cat exhibitor Hawthorn Corporation, performing with a Shrine circus, for failing to have enclosures that properly contained tigers at all times and failing to provide 12 tigers with enclosures that allowed for "full postural and social adjustments." The animals were kept in pairs inside enclosures that measured 4 feet high. They also weren't allowed into the exercise area on a daily basis.

**February 24, 2017:** The USDA cited big-cat exhibitor Hawthorn Corporation, performing with a Shrine circus, for failing to store food properly. Much of the rendered red meat, which was stored in a freezer room of the transport trailer, was opened or spilled, and some of it contained frost.

**May 25, 2016:** Carson & Barnes was ordered to pay a civil penalty of \$16,000 for allegedly mishandling elephants on two occasions in 2014 while performing

as Shrine circuses. (See April 14, 2014, and March 22, 2014.)

**April 21, 2016:** The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) suspended Tarzan Zerbini's permits to export two elephants to Canada for the 2016 Royal Canadian Circus season and then re-import them. The move followed PETA's lawsuit against the USFWS challenging its unlawful "pay-to-play" scheme, which allows exhibitors such as Tarzan Zerbini to pledge money to conservation groups in exchange for an endangered species permit. While PETA's lawsuit was pending, the agency noticed that Tarzan Zerbini had failed to make good on its financial pledge and suspended the permits.

**April 13, 2016:** Michael Hackenberger, owner of the now-defunct Bowmanville Zoo in Ontario, Canada—who had in previous years supplied big cats, baboons, and elephants to Canadian Shrine circuses—was charged with five counts of cruelty to animals after PETA eyewitness footage showed him whipping a tiger during a circus-style training session.

**April 27, 2015:** The USDA filed an AWA complaint against Carson & Barnes Circus and Royal Hanneford Circus for mishandling elephants during performances with Shrine circuses, resulting in injuries to the elephants. While Royal Hanneford was performing with the Moolah Shrine Circus in March 2014, three elephants were being escorted to an enclosure when the handlers lost control of one of them. Employees of Royal Hanneford Circus had encouraged audience members to make loud noises, stressing one elephant and causing her to escape from the handlers, resulting in abrasions and lacerations to her right side. A second elephant also sustained lacerations, to her left and right sides. (See March 22, 2014.) In addition, while performing with Zembo Shrine Circus in April 2014, Carson & Barnes was cited for mishandling elephants. The circus didn't have a barrier behind three elephants as they were led toward the housing area. A small boy and a man were able to approach the animals and take photos. (See April 14, 2014.)

**April 10, 2015:** The USDA cited big-cat exhibitor Mitchel Kalmanson, performing with the Shrine circus in Springfield, Missouri, for failing to have sufficient barriers between the tigers and the public, leaving the area holding the tigers unattended, failing to provide the tigers with adequate space and exercise, failing to store meat properly for the tigers, and transporting animals in a vehicle with exposed insulation material, a "foul odor," numerous flies and maggots, and a buildup of debris that appeared to be hair, food waste, and excreta.

**April 14, 2014:** The USDA cited Carson & Barnes, performing as the Zembo Shrine Circus, for failing to have a handler or an attendant present behind three

elephants as they were led toward the housing area. A small boy and a man were able to approach the animals and take photos.

**March 22, 2014:** While the Moolah Shrine Circus was performing at The Family Arena in St. Charles, Missouri, three elephants escaped from their handlers. They were loose for about 45 minutes and damaged multiple cars before the handlers were able to regain control of them.

**February 23, 2014:** According to multiple eyewitnesses, dogs were punched and kicked in the face during the Arab Shrine Circus, which was organized by Hamid Circus, at the Kansas Expocentre in Topeka. Horrified circusgoers shared what they had seen on Hamid Circus' Facebook page.

**December 28, 2013:** According to the *Black Hills Pioneer*, the Shrine circus in Deadwood, South Dakota, wasn't going to have its annual parade that preceded the performances. Circus officials told the Shrine circus committee that its animal handler insurance wouldn't cover the liability of having elephants possibly be startled while walking down the street.

**April 20, 2013:** A tiger with the Isis Shrine circus at the Salina Bicentennial Center in Salina, Kansas, escaped after a performance. A woman came face to face with the animal when she entered the women's bathroom and found him in there. She was able to back out of the restroom, and the tiger was recaptured.

**April 19, 2013:** An elephant whom Hamid Circus was planning to use at the Kora Shrine Circus in Maine was denied entry into the state. Hamid Circus didn't have the proper documentation for Nosey, an African elephant who has suffered from a chronic skin condition for more than two decades (see the Liebel Family Circus factsheet), to prove that she didn't have tuberculosis, which can be spread to humans.

**March 16, 2011:** The USDA cited exhibitor George Carden Circus, performing as Abou Ben Adhem Shrine Circus in Springfield, Missouri, for failing to have direct control and supervision of elephants during elephant rides. Two elephants were being used for rides, and two were standing in the center of the same ring used for rides. The two stationary elephants did not have handlers with control over them at all times. The handlers of the two giving rides were distracted several times, leaving the elephants to continue around the ring without direct control. At one point, the trunk of one elephant came very close to the passengers on the other elephant. During intermission, three elephants were used for rides while one stood in the center. At this time, three

handlers were left to manage the three giving rides, leaving the center elephant unattended. At one point, one handler was assigned to two elephants to oversee giving rides, leaving the rear elephant with no direct handler. Again, an elephant handler was distracted, leaving the elephant to continue around the ring with no direct handler.

**February 12, 2011:** The USDA cited exhibitor Hanneford Family Circus, performing as the Shrine circus at the Tingley Coliseum in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for failing to establish and maintain an adequate program of veterinary care. Liz, a 36-year-old Asian elephant, appeared to be thin and underweight, and she also had an angular limb deformity of the front left leg and a congenital deformity of her right hind leg. Both conditions affected her gait, which needed more frequent veterinary evaluations as she was aging. Hanneford was also cited for failing to provide an adequate barrier between the public and an elephant giving rides—children were able to get inside the rope barrier. The circus was also cited for not properly maintaining the trailer used to transport the elephants. There were numerous areas where metal lining had sharp, jagged edges, which could injure an elephant.

**April 9, 2010:** An animal handler with the Hamid Circus was kicked and thrown approximately 20 feet by an African elephant named Dumbo between performances at the Irem Shrine Circus in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The handler died at the scene from multiple traumatic injuries. The elephant had been leased from The Tiger and Elephant Encounter from Joe Frisco's Wonderful World of Animals. Frisco was later issued a \$1,600 penalty by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration for not furnishing the employee with a safe workplace. He was also issued an official warning from the USDA for violating the AWA for failing to provide Dumbo with a sufficient temporary enclosure and for failing to provide the USDA with an itinerary—during the investigation into the employee's death, the USDA discovered that Frisco had not notified the agency's animal-care regional director about this planned exhibit at this event.

**April 4, 2009:** The USDA cited exhibitor Will Davenport, dba Maximus Tons of Fun, performing as the Hejaz Shrine Circus in Greenville, South Carolina, with a direct noncompliance for failing to provide adequate veterinary care when all three elephants were found to be in poor body condition. All the elephants had lost more than 500 pounds each since the last time they were weighed, and one elephant was so thin that the vertebrae in her spine were prominent and her face sunken.

**March 7, 2009:** At least 15 children and one adult were injured when an elephant who was being used to give rides at the Murat Shrine Circus in Indianapolis became startled, stumbling and knocking over the scaffolding stairway leading to the elephant ride. People on the elephant's back and others who were standing on, under, and around the scaffolding were injured. Their injuries were treated at the scene.

**May 16, 2008:** The USDA cited animal exhibitor Brett Carden, performing as the Al Kaly Shrine Circus in Colorado Springs, Colorado, for failing to maintain an elephant transport enclosure properly. The enclosure had a bent metal panel with sharp edges that protruded into the area that contained the elephant. Carden was also cited for failing to provide sufficient employee supervision during periods of public contact with the petting zoo exhibit.

**May 6, 2008:** The USDA cited Ari and Lana Steeples, dba Steeples Bears, performing as the Kosair Shrine Circus, in Barbourville, Kentucky, for three noncompliances pertaining to their failure to provide adequate barriers between two adult male black bears and the public.

**March 28, 2008:** The USDA cited Rosaires Bears, performing as the Zembo Shrine Circus in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for failing to have a handler in control of two bears during a performance and failing to have barriers protecting the public from direct contact with the bears.

**March 19, 2007:** A *New York Times* examination of Shrine records found that more than 57 percent of the \$32 million raised in 2005 through circuses, bingo, and other fundraising events went to Shriner activities and temple expenses, including parties, liquor, and travel. Only 2 percent of the Shrine hospitals' operating income comes from money raised by Shrine temples. The investigation revealed that "more than 30 temples had discovered fraud like theft of money and inventory, altered bank statements, padded payrolls, and fake invoices."

**November 24, 2006:** Animal trainer Wade Burck was clawed by a tiger during a performance of the Hadi Shrine Circus in Evansville, Indiana. Burck received hospital treatment, including stitches, for wounds to his left forearm and leg.

**October 19, 2006:** The USDA cited animal exhibitor Brett Carden, performing at the Al Menah Shrine Circus in Nashville, Tennessee, for failing to keep two elephants under the direct control and supervision of a handler. The elephants were being used to give rides to members of the public. The inspector wrote, "The handler walked away from the elephants and turned away from the elephants to assist in another

matter unrelated to the elephants." The USDA also cited Carden for failing to store food supplies in a manner adequate to protect them from deterioration, mold, or contamination by vermin.

**April 29, 2006:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus, performing as the El Jebel Shrine Circus, in Denver for failing to have dangerous animals under the direct control and supervision of a knowledgeable and experienced animal handler. The inspector wrote, "Only one animal handler was available to manage two elephants providing rides to the public. There were times when both elephants were loaded with [members of the] public and the handler was not in the ring with the animals and could not have been in control of either elephant. No other knowledgeable and experienced elephant handler was available to assist this handler during public exhibition."

**March 25, 2006:** A *Montréal Gazette* article reported that a former Shrine circus clown was sentenced to three years in prison for sexually abusing his daughter and sister-in-law. He was found guilty of nine of the 42 charges filed against him, including sexual assault.

**March 16, 2006:** The USDA cited Hawthorn Corporation, an exhibitor performing for a Shrine circus in Springfield, Missouri, for failing to give veterinary care to a male lion who had three lesions, including a 3-inch-long open scrape on his right hip and scabbed-over lesions at the base of his tail and on his left hip. The licensee said that these lesions were caused by the lion's rubbing against the bars of the enclosure.

**March 16, 2006:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus, performing as a Shrine circus in Springfield, Missouri, for failing to give veterinary care to an elephant named Judy, who had three open wounds on her forehead and one open wound on her left front leg.

**February 24, 2006:** The USDA cited Hawthorn Corporation, an exhibitor performing for the Arab Shrine Circus in Topeka, Kansas, for failing to give adequate veterinary care to three tigers who had sores and spots of missing hair on top of their heads and near their eyes. Hawthorn was also cited for failing to have "any weapons that could immobilize, tranquilize, or [euthanize] any of the [eight] tigers if escape occurred."

**February 24, 2006:** The USDA cited Jorge Barreda, an exhibitor performing for the Arab Shrine Circus in Topeka, Kansas, for failing to maintain the sanitation of a transport trailer in which the inspector found "dried & caked elephant waste on the walls."

**January 31, 2005:** An elephant trainer with Tarzan Zerbini Circus was trampled to death by one of the elephants as the animals were being loaded into a trailer following performances at the Mizpah Shrine circus in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**November 26, 2004:** An ambulance was called to the Hadi Shrine Circus at Roberts Stadium in Evansville, Indiana, after a circusgoer was bitten on the cheek by a chimpanzee belonging to Zoppe-Rosaire Chimpanzees while posing for pictures. The patron was treated at the hospital for a puncture wound.

**April 9, 2003:** The USDA filed charges against Hawthorn Corporation, a company that supplies elephants and tigers to Shrine circuses. The complaint alleged 47 violations of the minimum standards of care established in the AWA. Charges include using physical abuse to train, handle, and work an elephant; failing to handle elephants in a manner that didn't cause unnecessary discomfort or physical harm; failing to have an attendant present during public contact; and failing to provide the following animals with adequate veterinary care: an elephant who was excessively thin with a protruding spine and hip bones, an elephant suffering from severe chemical burns and a bacterial infection, and four elephants with overgrown toenails and footpads.

**March 24, 2003:** The Associated Press reported that a Shetland pony at a Shrine circus in Lincoln, Nebraska, was chased by police officers and stopped traffic in the downtown area after bolting from the circus tent.

**March 13, 2003:** An editorial in the *Calgary Sun* stated, "Three years ago, I attended the Shrine Circus with my then 2½-year-old twin boys and vowed then that I'd never attend another circus that used wild, exotic animals for entertainment. ... [T]he animals were miserable and terribly treated, and ... the routines ... were, frankly, extremely boring."

**March 10, 2003:** According to *The Edmonton Sun*, a local Shriner admitted that statements made by club members may have misled the public into believing that circus profits would help sick kids and fund hospital operations when in fact the circus funds are used for administrative costs.

**March 2, 2003:** A 9,000-pound African elephant performing with Jordan World Circus at a Shrine circus in Muskegon, Michigan, escaped from a tent shortly before a performance and was recaptured 15 minutes later in a busy downtown area.

**August 2, 2002:** According to *The Halifax Herald Limited*, three elephants touring with Shrine circuses and giving rides to children were quarantined in Ontario and removed from Canada on July 13 after Canadian authorities were alerted by the USDA that the elephants had been in prolonged contact with a tuberculosis-positive elephant.

**June 17, 2002:** Two elephants, named Tory and Mary, performing with a Shrine circus in Menomonie, Wisconsin, left a circus tent during a show, scattering crowds. Mary walked 2 miles through town and was recaptured at the University of Wisconsin–Stout campus when trucks blocked her escape. One child was injured, and the elephants damaged a door at the park and caused \$600 in damage to a city truck. The Shriners had contracted with George Carden Circus for the event.

**May 29, 2002:** According to *The Detroit News*, attendance had declined 10 percent at the 2001 Metro Detroit Shrine Circus.

**April 13, 2001:** A letter to the editor published in the *Chicago Sun-Times* stated, "I escorted a group of schoolchildren, including my 8-year-old daughter, to this year's Medinah Shrine circus. ... When the elephants were brought behind the curtain, the trainer began verbally abusing and hitting the elephant. We watched in horror as he swung a stick with all his force and struck the elephant in the back of the leg. This must have hurt because the elephant let out a scream that could be heard throughout the UIC Pavilion. The kids were frightened and asked me why the man was hurting the elephant."

**April 13, 2000:** An elephant named Tina used in Shrine circuses was quarantined after testing positive for tuberculosis.

**January 26, 2000:** A 4,500-pound female African elephant named Kenya, who had been featured in Shrine circuses, attacked and killed a circus worker in Florida. The 18-year-old elephant knocked the woman to the ground and crushed her.

**October 15, 1999:** The *San Antonio Express-News* reported, "The money coming from this weekend's [Alzafar Shrine] circus proceeds does not go toward the 22 children's hospitals in the United States, Mexico, and Canada."

**April 29, 1999:** As a result of sustaining multiple injuries from an elephant while performing for a Shrine circus in Duluth, Minnesota, an animal handler was hospitalized in serious condition.

**March 1999:** An evaluation by the Council of Better Business Bureaus determined that the Shriners did not meet its standards, which recommend that at least 50 percent of a charity's income be spent on programs directly related to the organization's stated purpose. According to the evaluation, Shriners had spent only 24 percent on program services.

**February 1999:** During a risk-management presentation to the Shrine Treasurers Association of North America, the Shriners learned that a circus's insurance agent had given them a fraudulent certificate of insurance on a policy that didn't exist after someone was injured at a Shrine circus.

**November 13, 1998:** The same tiger used in Shrine circuses who killed a trainer on October 8, 1998, attacked and killed his owner in Newberry, Florida. The tiger was shot dead.

**October 8, 1998:** A tiger attacked and killed a trainer in Newberry, Florida. The tiger, who had been featured in numerous Shrine circuses, grabbed the trainer by the throat.

**April 13, 1997:** A spooked elephant performing at a Shrine circus in the city of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, slapped a handler with her trunk and bit him on the head and back, causing injuries serious enough to require hospitalization.

**March 18, 1997:** A bear with a Shrine circus in Grand Rapids, Michigan, bit off the tip of a 2-year-old child's finger. There were no safety barriers around the bear cages, and about 30 other children had been petting the bear.

**February 6, 1995:** An employee of Tarzan Zerbini Circus was stepped on by an elephant while loading the elephants into a trailer at the Mizpah Shrine Circus in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The employee sustained a crushed pelvis and was in critical condition.

**August 20, 1994:** An elephant named Tyke, who had rampaged at an Altoona, Pennsylvania, Shrine circus on April 21, 1993, killed a trainer while performing in Honolulu, Hawaii, stomped on a circus groom, and injured a dozen spectators.

**April 1994:** Three children were injured when an elephant who was being used for rides at a Shrine-sponsored circus in Muskegon, Michigan, fell into the passenger loading platform, spilling the riders and bending the platform.

**April 21, 1993:** An elephant named Tyke charged through an arena entryway during a Shrine circus performance in Altoona, Pennsylvania, ripping away part of the wall and causing \$10,000 in damage. More than 3,000 children were in the audience.

**October 14, 1992:** A handler was hospitalized for a leg injury after having been hit by an elephant's tusk when the animal slipped while giving rides to several children at a Shrine circus in Bloomington, Minnesota. One child sustained a minor injury.

**July 8, 1990:** A 600-pound tiger terrified hundreds of children and their parents when he ran loose for 15 minutes at a Shrine circus at Mississauga's Square One mall in Ontario, Canada.

**February 17, 1990:** According to the *Capital Times*, a woman alleged that "her foot was crushed by an elephant as she dismounted the behemoth she and her son had been riding at the Zor-Shrine circus at the Dane County Exposition Center" in Madison, Wisconsin.

**March 5, 1988:** A Detroit elephant trainer was treated in the intensive care unit of a Montréal hospital after being stomped on by an elephant during a performance of a Shrine circus. The trainer required emergency surgery for multiple abdominal injuries, including three cracked ribs and a damaged liver.

**1978:** A Hawthorn Corporation elephant performing in Chicago with a Shrine circus picked up a trainer with her trunk and threw him into a pillar, killing him.