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## **REXANO Asks the Fatal Tiger Attack at Public AZA Zoo Will Not be Exploited to Further Restrict Private Ownership of Exotic Animals.**

REXANO Press Editorial [www.REXANO.org](http://www.REXANO.org)

Las Vegas, NV (12/26/2007) -- Recent years brought extreme and unfair regulations and bans against private ownership of wild and exotic animals in the USA. The legislation usually exempts the zoos accredited by AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) and non profit tax exempt sanctuaries opposed to breeding of exotic animals, many of which are endangered and facing extinction in the wild.

The December 25th, 2007 fatal tiger attack at AZA accredited San Francisco Zoo, just like the majority of incidents in the last year, happened in a facility exempt from all the latest anti exotic animal legislation being passed under the guise of 'public safety'.

"It makes absolutely no sense to me; facilities responsible for the majority of recent captive animals incidents are exempt from the bans, while the responsible private owners are banned". says Zuzana Kukol, a Las Vegas big cat trainer, and co-founder of REXANO. "It is like taking driver licenses away from good drivers, while allowing the drunken ones on the streets, and if they get in the accident, somehow finding the way to blame to good drivers and use them as scapegoats over and over again".

In response to a December 3rd, 2007 tiger attack on a worker at her Shambala sanctuary, Tippi Hedren, known for her role in Alfred Hitchcock's movie 'The Birds', was quoted in LA Times: "'It's a terrible, terrible thing that has happened," Hedren said, adding that many of the tigers in her sanctuary come from abused backgrounds. "Who knows what happened to this tiger? ... It isn't the tiger's fault. It is the fault of the people breeding these animals in the first place that leads them to be here.'"

Miss Hedren is well known for being on the front lines to push for legislation and bans on private exotic animal ownership, while sanctuaries like hers are exempted from the very legislation she is pushing for.

"This kind of hypocritical attitude is always a red flag in what is supposed to be a fair and democratic US political system" says Kukol. "The tiger 'Alexander' arrived at Shambala as a very young cub from another federally and state licensed California facility which was shut down. If Miss Hedren is wondering what happened to this tiger, she should have all the answers,

since the tiger was raised at her facility from a tiny baby. Hedren needs to take full responsibility instead of shifting the blame on private breeders and pet owners who have no saying in what kind of safety protocols are applied at her Shambala center."

"In the USA, only one person dies per year as a result of attacks by captive big cats, 1.5 by captive reptiles, 0.81 by captive elephant, 0.125 by captive bear and 0 by captive non-human primate. In comparison, 45,000 people die each year in traffic accidents, 47 by lightning, and 1,600 by falling from stairs. We have detailed information on our website [www.rexano.org](http://www.rexano.org) about our ongoing fight against uninformed legislators and animal rights (AR) activists," says Scott Shoemaker, a co-founder of REXANO, a free web resource that provides tools and statistics-based research material to private owners of exotics to fight unfair legislation. Statistical analysis of the data disproves the claim that exotic animals in captivity are a threat to public safety.

The majority of fatalities are to handlers or owners or people voluntarily on the property where the animals are kept, not to the uninvolved public. Shoemaker advises: "The best way to avoid being killed by a captive exotic animal is to simply not trespass on the property where they are being kept."

"I have kept and trained hands on hundreds of big cats over the last 25 years. My highly trained staff and I make full contact with more than 100 large felines (Tigers, Leopards, Ligers) each week. I think it's quite evident from the 4 big cat attacks at AZA facilities (in Denver, twice in San Francisco, San Antonio) in the last 10 or 12 months along with many others over the last few years that we, the highly trained private sector, may be every bit if not more so qualified to keep big cats safely". says Dr. Bhagavan Antle director T.I.G.E.R.S. [www.tigerfriends.com](http://www.tigerfriends.com)

On July 14th, 2007, a keeper was attacked by a tiger at an AZA accredited San Antonio, TX Zoo. On February 24, 2007, a zookeeper was attacked and killed in Colorado by a male jaguar 'Jorge' at AZA accredited Denver Zoo. On December 22, 2006, a clouded leopard escaped her enclosure from AZA accredited National Zoo in Washington, DC. A few hours later, a female keeper was severely mauled on both arms by a caged tiger during feeding at AZA zoo in San Francisco, California, the same zoo and tiger where the latest suspicious tiger escape and fatal mauling occurred.

As reported in Examiner on December 30, 2006, AZA went on another unprovoked attack against private owners to deflect the blame instead of accepting the responsibility and stay focused on their problem:

"The reports may show that the procedures were followed, but with wild animals these things sometimes happen," said Steve Feldman, spokesman for the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the nation's accrediting body. Feldman said the vast majority of injuries from tigers happen to people who keep the animals as pets, not professionals who work with them in zoos."

**"This latest attack sheds light on the ridiculous law that again will be before the senate again in 2008 named the 'Haley's Act' that states only AZA facilities are qualified and equipped to handle big cats safely. It would make a very bad law making only the AZA exempted from the Haley's Act.**

**Clearly the life long animal trainers who work professionally with the cats are vastly more qualified to carry out the handling of large felines. "adds Dr. Antle.**

"I find the recent zoo incident very suspicious; seems like the zoo really had a safe enclosure, so I wonder how the tiger got out" asks Kukol. "It reminds me of the story from 2000; extreme animal rights activists were releasing captive exotic animals from captivity in zoos, including few circus tigers in Poland. When the tranquilizer failed to work on one of them, the tiger turned on the veterinarian. Police fired a few shots, missing the tiger, but hitting the vet in the head. The veterinarian later died in the hospital."

REXANO hopes this suspicious incident will be fully investigated and not be exploited and used to push the agenda of further prohibiting private exotic animals ownership in our society.

"Most of the wild habitat is disappearing. The only chance to save many animals such as tigers from extinction is captive breeding in the private sector, which has the majority of available habitat," adds Shoemaker.

"Even people who don't own animals should realize that every time a new law is passed, the government powers and bureaucracy grow and our personal freedoms shrink," warns Kukol.

REXANO sends condolences to the family of the fatal mauling victim and wishes speedy recovery to the remaining two men attacked by the tiger.

