

## The Focus of Safety at Zoos

The recent unfortunate episode at the Cincinnati Zoo has placed a focus on safety at zoos – both for the animals and the public that visits. Providing top-notch facilities that highlight species, with an educational balance for the public, is at the forefront of what all zoos must consider when they open their doors. While zoos strive to educate and provide entertainment to the public, they also are aware that they house many species that, in public situations, present a possible safety risk.

The Accreditation Commission of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) evaluates every zoo to make sure it meets AZA's standards for animal management and care, including living environments, social groupings, health and nutrition. The Commission also reviews the veterinary program, involvement in research and conservation, educational programs, safety policies and procedures, and security. As part of their accreditation, all zoos must have an animal escape plan and animal handling plan that are specific to their zoo, their species, and their situation. When accidents occur at other zoos, all zoos take stock to evaluate their enclosures and animals to see if there are ways to improve safety.

In a recent visit with Dr. Jeff Proudfoot, the Vice President of Veterinary Services at the Indianapolis Zoo, he discussed the Indianapolis Zoo's safety protocols. The zoo conducts safety drills including animal escape scenarios that practice the various options that may be required to resolve the situation; herding an animal back into their enclosure, immobilizing them or making the difficult decision to terminate the animal. All of this is established in an incident command system and decision trees include husbandry staff, zoo leadership and veterinary staff in order to come to a final dispensation. The procedures account for the possibility of a dynamic situation where if risks escalate, actions can change depending on the species and areas involved in the incident.

The Indianapolis Zoo formed a Barrier Task Force to continually evaluate and upgrade the space between the public and animals. Safety reviews have resulted in the placement of additional cameras to enclosures that can alert zoo staff if safety barriers have been breached. The zoo has identified these critical points and has spent \$1.7 million dollars to upgrade these barriers.

As you know and can see, the safety of the people and the animals is a high priority with zoo staff. They are very concerned with preserving their collection and providing a comfortable environment to observe these unusual animals. They are respectful of the animals and their behaviors, as well as public safety issues that may involve zoo patrons. The goal is to provide the public with information and enjoyment while helping to maintain these beautiful animals in a safe and enriching environment.