

OSHA SAYS ZOO IN LAS VEGAS UNSAFE FOR EMPLOYEES



The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Nevada, has cited the Las Vegas Zoo for multiple serious violations that put employees and the visiting public in danger. OSHA has proposed penalties of \$13,200. While Contact 13 has been covering animal welfare issues at the zoo for the past two and a half years, OSHA has been involved ever since employees wrote formal complaints detailing unsafe and unsanitary conditions. Also a matter of concern is zoo director Pat Dingle's apparent indifference to the OSHA inspections. The OSHA inspector was initially denied entry, much like in the case of Action News who had the office door slammed on them. Lisa Wathne of the Humane Society visited the zoo in July. She said, "It's a depressing and a sad place and an embarrassment to the city of Las Vegas". The OSHA inspector, on finally getting access, documented several serious hazards. The zoo received violations for electrical problems in the keeper house, the absence of safeguards in the reptile house and a lack of protective gear for personnel working with the barbary apes. OSHA also found multiple serious hazards endangering the "young and inexperienced high school interns working on the school property". An employee who quit after being injured by an ape wrote, "I was put in extreme danger by Pat Dingle and fear for future zookeepers and the general public". Animal welfare advocate Linda Faso who says she is not surprised with the OSHA citations expressed particular concern over what the USDA wrote zoo owner Pat Dingle up for in late September. The USDA pointed out the case of Sayda, a female ape who is housed alone, saying that the zoo's treatment of their barbary apes is "not in accordance with currently accepted professional standards". She added, "He shouldn't have those primates -- he's not qualified". Pat Dingle has been quoted as saying the proposed \$13,000 fine could force the zoo to close down. Meanwhile State Sen. John Lee has expressed concern over what he describes as Nevada's OSHA office placing burdensome fines on small businesses. He says placing a penalty on a nonprofit running on a slim budget is another example of bureaucrats gone wild. He questions whether the state OSHA has the right mission saying while it needs to increase safety; it increasingly appears focused on applying fines that can put small operators out of business. OSHA doesn't exist to "fine you for everything it can," Lee says. "It's amazing to me that this seems to have happened in the last two years. They've become code enforcers, a quasi-Building Department". "We want people safe, but these tactics are abusive", the senator concluded. Governor Brian Sandoval's office has also been updated on the developments at the Las Vegas Zoo. A spokesman for the Department of Business and Industry said Wednesday the issue is being reviewed.

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