

March 5, 2009

Kelly Sprinkles, Principal
Knox County Middle School
311 North Main St.
Barbourville, KY 40906

1 page via e-mail

Dear Mr. Sprinkles:

PETA is an international nonprofit organization with more than 2 million supporters dedicated to the protection of animals. I am writing to draw your attention to some urgent information about the bear act that performed with the Shrine Circus at your school on May 6, 2008. Please consider the following information and establish a permanent policy against hosting on school property any circus that uses animals.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspected the Shrine Circus' bear act while it performed at Knox County Middle School last May. The enclosed USDA inspection report indicates that the exhibitor was cited for serious noncompliances with the federal Animal Welfare Act. Steeples Bears failed to handle the bears in a manner that minimized the risk of harm to the animals and to the public and failed to provide a safe distance or barrier between the animals and the public to ensure the safety of both.

During the performance, the inspector noted that "the public was seated within 20 feet of the ring ... no barriers, fence panels, or other circus employees [were] present to act as a barrier between the public and the bears. This is required to protect both the animals and the public should the bears get away from the handlers or a member of the public attempt to enter the circus ring."

Bears are shy and solitary animals by nature and have great difficulty coping with the noise and stress of circus life and forced interaction with humans. Dominance and physical punishment are standard training techniques in the circus. All too often, animals react to their psychologically and physically inadequate accommodations in captivity by attacking or killing their trainers or bystanders. Since 1990, captive bear attacks on humans have resulted in three deaths and 35 serious injuries.

Barbara W. Boat, Ph.D., associate professor of psychiatry at the Children's Hospital Medical Center, advises against exposing children to this abuse: "An industry based upon the use and abuse of wild animals has no place in either the education or entertainment of young children."

Knox County-area students will learn nothing about bears' natural behavior or intelligence by seeing them dance or perform tricks. I hope to hear that you will establish a policy against animal circuses. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

RaeLeann Smith

Circus & Government Affairs Specialist

Enclosures: USDA Inspection Report, May 6, 2008
 Bear Incidents Factsheet
 Dangerous Incidents Factsheet

CC: Walter T. Hulett, Superintendent, Knox County Schools