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Shedd Aquarium Statement Following SeaWorld Orlando Incident

The unfortunate tragedy that occurred Wednesday afternoon at SeaWorld Orlando was a great loss to everyone in the marine mammal training community. On behalf of Shedd Aquarium, our thoughts go out to the family of the trainer and our colleagues at SeaWorld.

At Shedd Aquarium, animals connect our guests to the living world inspiring them to make a difference. Animal care, along with the safety of our guests and staff, are our top priorities. While we review our safety protocols and procedures on a regular basis, following yesterday's incident, we have again reviewed them to ensure complete security and confidence within our daily practices.

Zoos and aquariums play an important role in our communities across the country and the world. By inspiring guests who may never have the opportunity to see an animal up close, our amazing animal collections facilitate learning, conservation and stewardship for our natural world.

According to a nationwide study that included thousands of visitors from several AZA-accredited institutions, visitors believe zoos and aquariums play an important role in conservation education and animal care. Visitors also believe they experience a stronger connection to nature as a result of seeing animals in our care.

The animals in our care are the best ambassadors for their species. The excellent knowledge gained from caring and interacting with our animals not only improves their quality of life, but provides critical data that supports successful conservation programs in the wild. In addition, as our planet continues to change and animal habitats continue to disappear, zoo and aquariums are increasingly becoming the last crusaders in avoiding extinction. Shedd Aquarium, along with the hundreds of accredited zoos and aquariums across the country, are wildlife's best chance for survival.

We're very proud of the dedicated women and men who care for the animals in aquariums and zoos each day and value the important role they play in education and conservation. We look forward to continuing to share our mission with the nearly 2 million guests that visit Shedd Aquarium each year.

About Shedd's Beluga Encounter Program:

Shedd's beluga encounter program was designed with guest, staff and animal safety as its top priority. Shedd's beluga encounter experience is facilitated by an expert marine mammal trainer and allows guests to get waist deep in the water for a hands-on experience with a beluga whale. It is not a swim-with program.

After every encounter, Shedd's marine mammal trainers review the session to ensure the utmost safety protocols and procedures were enacted, and if needed, make adjustments. Guest, staff and animal safety again is Shedd's top priority.

The general temperament of beluga whales is docile and the whales that are part of our encounter program are extremely friendly and enjoy human interaction.