

# News Release

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US Labor Department's OSHA cites SeaWorld of Florida following animal trainer's death

**ORLANDO, Fla.** - The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has [cited SeaWorld of Florida LLC](#) for three safety violations, including one classified as willful, following the death of an animal trainer in February. The total penalty is \$75,000.

"SeaWorld recognized the inherent risk of allowing trainers to interact with potentially dangerous animals," said Cindy Coe, OSHA's regional administrator in Atlanta, Ga. "Nonetheless, it required its employees to work within the pool walls, on ledges and on shelves where they were subject to dangerous behavior by the animals."

On Feb. 24, a six-ton killer whale grabbed a trainer and pulled her under the water during what SeaWorld describes as a "relationship session," which was also observed by park guests. Video footage shows the killer whale repeatedly striking and thrashing the trainer, and pulling her under water even as she attempted to escape. The autopsy report describes the cause of death as drowning and traumatic injuries.

**OSHA's investigation revealed that this animal was one of three killer whales involved in the death of an animal trainer in 1991 at Sea Land of the Pacific in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. SeaWorld had forbidden trainers from swimming with this whale because of his dangerous past behavior, but allowed trainers to interact with the whale, including touching him, while the trainers were lying on the pool edge in shallow water.**

**In addition to the history with this whale, the OSHA investigation revealed that SeaWorld trainers had an extensive history of unexpected and potentially dangerous incidents involving killer whales at its various facilities, including its location in Orlando. Despite this record, management failed to make meaningful changes to improve the safety of the work environment for its employees.**

"All employers are obligated to assess potential risks to the safety and health of their employees and take actions to mitigate those risks," said Les Grove, OSHA's area director in Tampa, Fla. "In facilities that house wild animals, employers need to assess the animals under their care and to minimize human-animal interaction if there is no safe way to reliably predict animal behavior under all conditions."

OSHA has issued one willful citation to SeaWorld for exposing its employees to struck-by and drowning hazards when interacting with killer whales. The agency defines a willful violation as one committed with plain indifference to or intentional disregard for employee safety and health.

A serious citation is being issued for exposing employees to a fall hazard by failing to install a stairway railing system on the front side, left bridge of the "Believe" stage in Shamu Stadium. OSHA issues a serious citation when death or serious physical harm is likely to result from a hazard about which the employer knew or should have known.

One other-than-serious violation has been issued for failing to equip outdoor electrical receptacles in Shamu Stadium with weatherproof enclosures. An other-than-serious violation is described as a situation that relates to job safety and health that would not likely cause death or serious physical harm.

The company has 15 business days from receipt of the citations to comply, request an informal conference with OSHA's area director in Tampa or contest the citations and penalties before the independent Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission.

To report workplace accidents, fatalities or situations posing imminent danger to workers, call OSHA's toll-free hotline at 800-321-OSHA (321-6742). Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to assure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit <http://www.osha.gov>.

It is not required viewing, however video footage of a similar event that occurred in 2006 can be accessed using the link below. After reading the OSHA file and watching the video, can a hazard assessment be used to prevent this from happening? Is this realistic?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5B\\_poyjBqYE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5B_poyjBqYE)