

**Opinions regarding chaining of elephants**  
**Testimony to Massachusetts legislators**  
**Dr. Joyce Poole, January 2007**



***In my opinion the chaining of elephants by circuses is physically harmful.*** Elephants are adapted to continuous movement over long distances. In the wild elephants are on the move 20 out of 24 hours, while in circuses the evidence from chaining suggests the reverse. Elephants in circuses are plagued by a host of physical and psychological ailments that are not observed among wild elephants. Regardless of the regular health care they receive, and despite the lack of human predation and the vagaries of drought and disease, captive elephants suffer from a host of ailments including obesity, arthritis, foot problems, reproductive and psychological disorders and die at a younger age. The pads of an elephant's foot are designed for walking long distances on uneven and rough surfaces not for standing on concrete. As a result of the predominantly stationary existence on smooth surfaces, the feet of captive elephants wear unevenly causing improper posture of the feet, and consequently of the legs and spine, and leading to painful arthritis and other joint problems. In circus elephants the joints of the extremities and also the joints of the vertebral column are affected by pathologic alterations. The uneven wear shows up regularly in captivity and the adage "use it or lose it" applies aptly to the circus elephants. Elephants need to walk to stay well.

***In my opinion the chaining of elephants by circuses is behaviorally, psychologically and emotionally harmful.*** Some of the features that make elephants so well designed for living in large spaces, become the very reasons for the unsuitability of elephants to the circus. For example, individuals so behaviorally and emotionally well adapted to living in a close-knit society, in circuses are not allowed the space necessary to live in natural family groups, never mind any attempt to present elephants with the option of choosing associates from among other families, clans or populations or providing the opportunity for learning survival skills through experience or from others. By chaining elephants, circuses not only severely restrict an elephant's ability to obtain adequate exercise, but they take away an enormous source of mental stimulation needed for the basic well being of such a highly social intelligent individual. As a result, the elephants are behaviorally and psychologically harmed.

The chaining and confinement of elephants in circuses deprives elephants of the opportunity to establish and foster the complex social relationships and social learning for which elephants are so well known. A life in chains does not permit elephants to search for, select from, learn about and manipulate a wide variety of food items. The normal daily activities experienced by a free-ranging elephant motivate an active mind and keep fit a vigorous body. No matter what the arena, foraging, defending, socializing, or reproducing, an elephant's daily life is distinguished by need, purpose, challenge, choice, will, autonomy and solidarity. Chaining denies an elephant these elements, so fundamental to its psychological and emotional well being. Given elephants' high level of intelligence and inquisitive nature, the confinement of elephants on chains is inhumane.

The chaining of elephants by circuses is the most likely cause of the stereotypical swaying observed in the elephants and demonstrates the harm inflicted on these animals from chaining and confinement. Such behavior is pathological and is indicative of psychological, behavioral and emotional harm.

Elephants in circuses are usually chained in loud environments with considerable low frequency generator and other machine noise. Generators produce sound at the frequencies at which elephant hearing is most sensitive and also at the frequencies at which elephants themselves communicate. The ability of elephants to detect very low frequency sounds over long distances means that in city environments, during transport in trucks and trains, and in the vicinity of circus generators, elephants are continuously exposed to low frequency machine, vehicle and air traffic noise. The elephants extreme sensitivity to these frequencies means that the loud low frequency noise that circus elephants are subjected to at various urban locations and during transport are neither humane nor healthful.