




CITY OF LITTLE ROCK

## MEMORANDUM

**TO: BRUCE T. MOORE, CITY MANAGER**

**FROM: JAMES JONES, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER** 

**SUBJECT: INVESTIGATION REPORT OF THE OCTOBER 10, 2014,  
JAGUAR INCIDENT AT THE LITTLE ROCK ZOO**

**DATE: NOVEMBER 3, 2014**

Summary:

On the morning of Friday, October 10, 2014, a male three (3)-year old child fell into the Jaguar Exhibit. Little Rock Zoo Staff quickly responded, and employees utilized a fire extinguisher to keep the cats away from the child while another employee lowered a ladder, entered the yard and removed the child. The child arrived at Arkansas Children's Hospital less than twenty (20) minutes later.



*Jaguar Exhibit Signage which includes a description of the exhibit.*

### Sequence of Events:

On the morning of Friday, October 10, 2014, a male three (3)-year old child fell into the Jaguar Exhibit. The only eye witnesses of the child's fall were the parents and grandparents. Zoo employees heard screaming and calls for assistance. Erin Lien, an Animal Keeper for the Elephants, was nearby at the elephant yard and heard the father of the child yelling that his son had fallen into the Lion Exhibit and was in need of help. Ms. Lien radioed Zoo Staff, alerting them that a child had fallen into the Big Cat Exhibit and assistance was needed. Paul Caster, an Animal Keeper for the Birds/Savanna, was nearby in the camel yard and heard the screams and rushed toward the Big Cat Exhibit. While enroute toward the Big Cats Exhibit, Melissa Martin, an Animal Keeper for the Primates/Apes, grabbed a fire extinguisher from the Hay Barn, which is located at the top of exhibit, and gave it to Mr. Caster, and then went to get another extinguisher. Mr. Caster noticed that the cat was on the child and began shooting the extinguisher at the jaguars, which caused them to retreat from the child.

Until the child was removed to safety, staff continued to utilize the extinguisher to prevent the Jaguar from moving back towards the child. Sherre Sachar, an Animal Keeper for Farm/Waterfowl, responded to the radio call, drove behind the Big Cat Exhibit, and was instructed by a Supervisor to call 911. Utilizing the Zoo radio, she also requested a ladder. Sarah Kline, the Zoo Veterinarian, heard the screams, rushed to the area and grabbed a nearby ladder. Along with help from Billy Jack Hathcock, the Zoo welder, she carried the ladder to the Jaguar Exhibit. Having arrived at the top of the Jaguar Exhibit, Donnie Childers, Zoo Facilities Supervisor, and Jim Newman, Zoo Maintenance Worker, assisted Mr. Hathcock by placing the ladder down into the exhibit and held the ladder so that Mr. Hathcock could climb down and rescue the child, who was standing with arms raised wanting to be picked-up. Mr. Childers took the child from Mr. Hathcock, handed him to the father and helped place the father and child into a Zoo golf cart for transport to the Administrative Gate. The golf cart and MEMS arrived at the Administrative Gate at approximately the same time.

911 received a call at 10:45:23 AM stating that an infant was dropped in the tiger cage at the Little Rock Zoo. MEMS and Little Rock Fire Department trucks were dispatched at 10:47:09 AM and advised to come to the Zoo Administrative Gate. Engine 3 arrived on site (Zoo Administrative Gate) at 10:49:41 AM and Fire Truck 7 arrived 10:50:03 AM. Zoo Staff had retrieved the child from the Big Cat Exhibit, transported the child and his father via golf cart to the Zoo Administrative Building area where they were placed in the awaiting MEMS vehicle. The child arrived at Arkansas Children's Hospital at 11:06:56 AM.

A second 911 call was received at 11:05:19 AM, and a Little Rock Police Department unit was dispatched at 11:06:52 AM, arriving at the Zoo at 11:14:04 AM. In addition, LRPD responded and made contact with Zoo employees. All employees who were present or responded and provided written statements and

the exhibit area was photographed. LRPD interviewed the parents and grandparents at Arkansas Children's Hospital.

Conclusion & Recommendation:

From the instant the child fell into the exhibit, staff heard the screams for help, a distress call "Code Red" via radio was made regarding the child, and multiple Animal Keepers responded. Code Red is an emergency response for dangerous animal escape that can cause life threatening injuries to humans, and the same action implemented to protect humans from wild animals. On June 10, 2014, Zoo Staff participated in a Code Red exercise, and met on October 7, 2014, to discuss revisions to Code Red Policy. In addition, staff completed a Code Red Drill at 8:30 AM, the morning of the incident. Each Zoo employee responded appropriately and executed their role to near perfection. From the time the child fell into the exhibit, the Code Red was announced on the radio; the child was safely removed from the exhibit and delivered to the emergency room within twenty-one (21) minutes. Medical information is not available without release from the family, and it is unknown as to whether the child's injury was from the fall itself or from the jaguar(s). Based on the excellent response and action by Zoo Staff, it is my opinion that proper emergency procedure and training is in place and worked in this situation. Zoo Staff is to be commended for its rapid and professional response in saving the child from further injuries. In addition, I confirmed that the exhibit fully complies with all applicable regulations.

It is my recommendation that the Little Rock Zoo invest in additional signage that can be placed throughout the Zoo to remind the public to remain behind all barriers. In addition, staff should post signage throughout the Zoo listing a phone number that will reach a staff member instantly in the event of an emergency.

To complete this report, I reviewed the Little Rock Zoo's accreditation inspection, which was completed by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' Accreditation Commission (AZA) in July 2011 and the Little Rock Zoo Safety Manual and Policy for the Big Cat Exhibit.

If additional information is needed, please advise.