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Tigers in the suburbs? Captive Wild Animal Death Rate Reaches All Time High

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One day after a California court wisely found John Weinhart guilty on 56 of 61 charges stemming from one of the most heinous animal cruelty discoveries— 58 frozen tiger cub carcasses and the decomposing remains of more than 30 other big cats—**authorities shot and killed a 600 pound tiger loose in the hills of Southern California.**

While the shooting of an escaped tiger today is tragic, it is also preventable. Sadly, violent, often fatal, incidents involving privately owned big cats are occurring at an alarming rate across the country.

The Captive Wild Animal Protection Coalition (CWAPC), representing 20 leading animal protection organizations, zoos, and sanctuaries, believes keeping wild animals as pets is dangerous for people and inhumane for animals. CWAPC tracks and reports on incidents involving captive wild animals and warns that the rate of human injury and death from privately owned big cats and other wild animals is increasing.

In 2004, there were at least:

- 4 human adult fatalities**
- 27 human adult injuries**
- 13 human child injuries**
- 307 animal fatalities**
- 81 animal escapes, and**
- 608 confiscated or displaced captive wild animals**

In 2003, there were at least 33 incidents involving captive big cats. Of these incidents, 3 were human fatalities, 14 human injuries; hundreds more either escaped or were confiscated. When animals escape the public is put in great danger, tremendous resources are tapped, and ultimately the animal often ends up shot and killed. **It is estimated that there are between 10,000 and 20,000 big cats in private ownership in the U.S.—many more than remain in the wild—and there are no federal regulations banning this practice.**

And while big cats such as tigers are often in the headlines, other exotic animals including primates, bears, and reptiles can be equally dangerous and are kept in private hands in backyards nationwide.

Tragic incidents will continue unless we end the private ownership of dangerous wild animals. In 2003, Congress enacted legislation to end the interstate commerce in big cats as pets. If future injuries and deaths are to be avoided, local and state governments must also bar the keeping of these animals, and ensure adequate enforcement of existing laws.