

The Dangers of Marine Mammals in Captivity

A Timeline of Injuries and Deaths to People, Dolphins and Whales

The recent deaths of SeaWorld trainer Dawn Brancheau and Spanish trainer Alexis Martinez, both thrashed by SeaWorld orcas within two months of each other,

illuminates an unpopular truth: that when it comes to marine mammals in captivity, history is bound to repeat itself. Since 1991 four people have died at the hands of orcas in captivity, and there are dozens of others that have nearly died over the last forty years. When we subjugate these animals for our amusement, despite their consistent protesting behavior, it says more about our intelligence than it does theirs.

In the history of mankind not one orca has killed a human in the wild, but Tilikum, a 12,000-pound orca in captivity, has been implicated in three deaths in his lifetime. As the death and injury toll continues to rise at marine mammal parks around the world, we need to think seriously about what is being learned through the amusement

shows that are responsible for almost all of the accidents. The very same behaviors demonstrated at marine parks are illegal in nature. It should come as no surprise that Florida has a growing problem with harassment of marine mammals in the wild, when they also have more live dolphin shows than any other state.

There are just as many, if not more examples of marine mammals becoming seriously injured or killed in captivity. Among the tragic accidents illustrated here – and this is by no means a comprehensive list – repeat behaviors and recurring frequent deaths are clear indicators that this will continue to happen unless we rethink the role of these wild animals in captivity.

“There is about as much educational benefit to be gained in studying dolphins in captivity as there would be studying mankind by only observing prisoners held in solitary confinement.” -Jacques Cousteau



April 1971

Orca: Shamu

Public Relations Secretary Annette Eckis is tossed off the back of 5 year old female Shamu while riding her for a publicity stunt. Shamu rams her around the tank, refusing to release her. When Eckis is finally able to exit the pool Shamu seizes her leg and will not let go. Eckis suffers lacerations, puncture wounds and received 200 stitches below the waist. Eckis is later told that no one had ever ridden Shamu without a wetsuit (she was in a bikini for publicity's sake) and no women had ever ridden Shamu.²

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

November 1987

Orca: Orky II (3rd incident)

Five-ton male Orky crashes down on his trainer, John Sillick during a performance. Sillick nearly dies from severe fractures to both hips, pelvis, ribs and legs. After six reconstructive surgeries in fourteen months, Sillick can walk with limited activity.³

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA



During a four month period in 1987, fourteen trainers are injured by animals at SeaWorld San Diego. Trainers are ordered to stay out of all orca pools for six months. Three SeaWorld officials, including the president, are fired in December.⁵

1970's

Orca: Kianu
Trainer Jeff Pulaski is thrown off by young female Kianu and chased out of the tank.¹

Marine World / Closed

1970's

Orca: Hugo (2nd incident)
Young male Hugo breaks an observation window, causing significant water loss, and slices off the end of his nose.³

Miami Seaquarium / AMMPA

1970's

Orca: Nepo
Trainer Dave Worcester is dragged to the bottom of the pool by the young male, Nepo.¹

Marine World California / Closed

May 1978

Orca: Orky II (2nd incident)
Ten year old male, Orky II, pins trainer Jill Stratton to the bottom of the tank and holds her underwater for four minutes. Stratton nearly drowns.⁴

Marineland of the Pacific / Closed

February 1984

Orca: Kandu V
Seven year old female Kandu V takes trainer Joanne Hay in her mouth and pins her against a wall during a live performance.⁵

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

November 1984

Orca: Kandu V (2nd incident)
Female Kandu grabs the legs of her trainer Georgia Jones during a live performance, then releases the trainer unharmed.⁵

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

November 1986

Orca: Kandu V (3rd incident)
Female Kandu holds trainer Mark Beeler against a wall during a live performance.⁵

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

1970's

Orca: Orky II
Unidentified male trainer is seized by the leg and held at the bottom of the pool until he loses consciousness.²

Marineland of the Pacific / Closed

1970's

Orca: Hugo
Young male Hugo closes his mouth on trainer Chris Christiansen's head. Christiansen receives seven stitches in his cheeks.²

Miami Seaquarium / AMMPA

1980

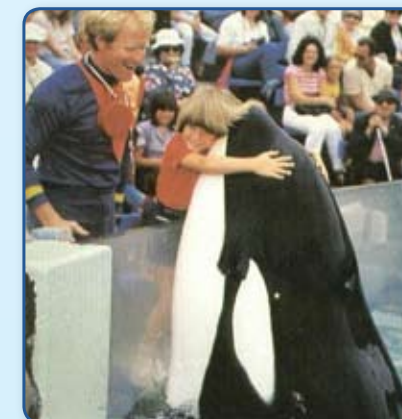
During a labor strike that lasts 41 days, four dolphins die because they refused to accept food from anyone but their handlers. The official causes of the deaths include: adrenal exhaustion, stress, starvation, dehydration and emaciation.

Montreal Aquarium

November 1984

Two orcas grab trainer, Bud Krames, by the legs and pin him against a glass retaining wall during a performance.³

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA



A child hugs Kandu V, an orca that has been involved in six violent incidents.

March 1987

Orca: Shamu, Kandu V (4th incident)
A six-ton orca grabs trainer Jonathan Smith and carries him to the bottom of the tank. When he is released at the surface, bleeding, a second whale slams into him. Both whales continue to drag him underwater. Smith escapes with a ruptured kidney, lacerations to his liver and severe cuts.³

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

During 1989 to 1994, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) receives more than a dozen reports of injuries (at least two per year in the U.S. alone) to people who participated in Swim with the Dolphin sessions, ranging from a cracked sternum to broken arms, lacerations and shock. Broken bones are repeatedly described as the result of "accidental bumps."

Dolphin Deaths in Captivity

Miami, FL

Since government began keeping its record, 62 dolphins have died at the Miami Seaquarium from salmonella, toxic hepatitis, acute hemorrhaging, and meningitis, to name a few. More violent deaths include in 1975 a 1-month old dolphin died due to "shock during movement," and in 2001, a 10-year old died from "concussive brainstem impact."¹¹

Hawaii

At Sea Life Park in Hawaii, malnutrition, food poisoning, debilitation, and most recently, "failure to thrive," have been cited as the cause of death.¹¹

San Diego, CA

In the last 25 years, pneumonia killed 24 bottlenose dolphins in SeaWorld parks. Eleven - nearly half - of the pneumonia-related deaths occurred in SeaWorld's San Diego park.¹¹

Gulfport, MS

At the Marine Life Oceanarium in Gulfport, MS, 37 dolphins have died from pneumonia. The most recent two dolphin deaths went unreported. The park was later destroyed in Hurricane Katrina.¹¹

San Antonio, TX

According to the Marine Mammal Inventory Report, 53 orcas have died in captivity. Of those, 22 - nearly half - died in SeaWorld parks in the last 24 years. In San Antonio's facilities the deceased orcas lived an average of 9 years after arriving at the park; average life expectancy for female killer whales is 50 years in the wild, with maximum longevity estimated 80 - 90 years. The captive born dolphins who died, lived only four years on average. In the wild, life expectancy for dolphins is 40 - 45 for males and more than 50 years for females. In all, six orcas, twelve dolphins and eleven beluga whales have died at SeaWorld's San Antonio park.¹¹

Australia

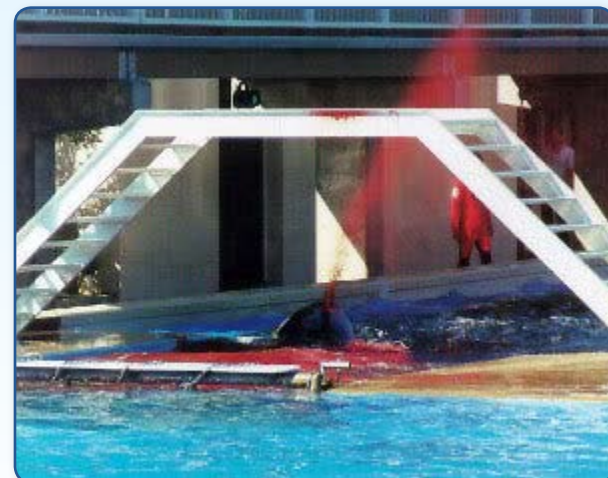
At Sea World Enterprises in Australia, 16 dolphins died from causes as varied as multiple spine fractures, twisted bowels, heart and mammary abscesses, hemorrhaging, injury during a fight, "operating stress," and severe anemia.¹¹

Sweden

Sweden's Kolmardens Djurpark AB was responsible for several shocking dolphin deaths in the 1990s. In 1989 and 1991, two week-old dolphins died from severe hemorrhaging, in separate incidents, one as the result of smashing into the tank wall. A third traumatic head injury killed a two week old male in 1995. In 1991 a healthy 9 year old female also died from overexertion.¹¹

Hong Kong

The Ocean Park Corporation in Hong Kong has had 29 dolphins die under its watch including three from viral hepatitis A, and one who suffered ingesting a foreign object.¹¹



August 1989

Orca: Kanduk V (6th incident)
Kanduk V charges at another orca, Corky II, with her mouth during a live show, misses, and hits the wall. The blow severs an artery near her jaw and causes her to bleed profusely. After 45-minute hemorrhage, Kanduk V dies.⁷

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

June 1987

Orca: Kanduk V (5th incident)
Kanduk, a three-ton orca, lands on trainer Joanne Weber during a rehearsal. Weber suffers permanent loss of head movement due to a fractured bone in her neck.³

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

1989

Orca: Nootka IV (2nd incident)
Nootka drags head trainer Steve Huxter into the pool by his leg after he attempts to retrieve a tourist's camera that dropped into the orca tank. Huxter is rescued by staff.⁶

Sealand of the Pacific - Victoria, BC / closed

1987-1990

A number of complaints are reported to the USDA against Ocean World, including complaints that three dolphins had been held in a tank the size of a backyard pool, dolphins had been forced to swim in a pool laced with paint, and overchlorinated water was burning dolphins' skin.⁸

1991

Orca: Kahana
Female orca Kahana dies after colliding with a tank wall. She suffers multiple skull fractures, cerebral contusions and severe hemorrhaging.³

SeaWorld - San Antonio / AZA / AMMPA

June 1992

Ocean World is ordered by the USDA to close its doors for two weeks and pay \$20,000 in fines for mistreating its animals. The USDA files charges against the park in August 1991, despite receiving complaints as far back as 1987, spurring accusations of poor government regulation and oversight of marine mammal parks.⁸

June 1992

Dolphin: Pepper
A 27 year old dolphin suffers a fractured vertebrae when he is dropped by handlers transferring him to a new pool. The park says Pepper thrashed and became tangled, causing his own injury. The dolphin never performs again.⁹

Ocean World - Fort Lauderdale / closed

April 1989

Orca: Nootka IV
Six year old female Nootka IV bites trainer Henriette Huber's hand and drags her into the tank as she attempts to scratch the orca's tongue. Huber has to be rescued and receive stitches for her lacerations. Huber quits her job citing "unsafe conditions."⁶

Sealand of the Pacific - Victoria, BC / closed

February 1991

Orca: Tilikum, Haida, Nootka IV (3rd incident)
Trainer Keltie Byrne slips and falls into the orcas' tank without a wetsuit. Three orcas drag her underwater around the pool until she drowns. It takes rescuers several hours to recover her body. Her death prompts three trainers injured in 1987 (Smith, Weber and Sillick), to file lawsuits. All three settle out of court with imposed gag orders.³

Sealand of the Pacific - Victoria, BC / closed



Tilikum, Haida, Nootka IV

August 1991

After 29 years, Sealand of the Pacific closes permanently following the death of trainer Keltie Byrne. Tilikum and Nootka IV, two of the orcas responsible for Byrne's death, are shipped to SeaWorld Orlando. Haida and her calf are sold to SeaWorld San Antonio.⁶

Sealand of the Pacific - Victoria, BC / closed

March 1992

Orca: Samoa
A young female, 13, dies in a SeaWorld facility. For months prior to her death Samoa was seen performing bizarre repetitive movements, hurling her body into the air and crashing down on a hard surface next to her tank. SeaWorld staff claim never to have witnessed such behavior.³

SeaWorld - San Antonio / AZA / AMMPA

September 1994

Ocean World closes due to lack of profits and bad publicity regarding its mistreatment of animals.¹⁰



July 1999

Orca: Kasatka

Kasatka, a 22 year old female becomes aggressive with her trainer Kenneth Peters, grabs him by the leg and attempts to throw him from the pool during a live show. SeaWorld spokesperson Darla Davis says, "while it is unusual for a whale to bite a trainer, Kasatka is the dominant whale in her pod and will definitely be more aggressive than the others." (Some sources say Kasatka's behavior was a result of being separated from her daughter.)^{13, 14}

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

November 2006

Orca: Kasatka (2nd incident with same trainer)

During a live show trainer Kenneth Peters is launched into the air by 7,000 pound female, Kasatka. Kasatka grabs Peters by his feet, drags him underwater and shakes him violently for nearly a minute, according to OSHA's official report. Peters then surfaces only to be thrashed again and taken back down to the bottom of the tank where Kasatka lay against him until he went limp. Peters manages to survive with only puncture wounds and a broken foot. OSHA's inspector writes that "swimming with captive orcas is inherently dangerous, and if someone hasn't been killed already, it is only a matter of time before it does happen." OSHA later rescinds the report on the basis that the inspector's conclusions went beyond the scope of their role.^{5, 20}

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA



Trainer Kenneth Peters was attacked by Kasatka twice.

July 1995

Orca: Splash

Splash, a 6 year old male, is injured after swimming very fast into a tank gate. His flesh catches on a hinge and rips a gash from his chin to his lip. Splash sinks to the bottom of the tank where two companion orcas, Orkid and Kasatka support him to the surface where he is able to continue breathing until trainers can step in.¹³

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

November 1998

Orca: Sumar

At six months old, Sumar is attacked by his own mother, Taima during a show. She hits him with her tail and then tosses him onto a trainer platform where she proceeds to pin Sumar down and bite him. Guests are evacuated. Mother and the very young calf are permanently separated after the incident.¹³

SeaWorld - Orlando / AZA / AMMPA

July 1999

Orca: Tilikum (2nd incident)

On the morning of July 6th, 1999, a member of the public is found dead in an orca enclosure. The body of Daniel Dukes, 27, is naked and draped over the back of male orca, Tillikum, at SeaWorld Orlando. At 5 tons, the 14 year old male is the largest in captivity and was also involved in a death at Sealand in 1991.

The autopsy report indicates that Dukes was bitten in the groin after drowning in cold water. Duke's parents initially filed a several million dollar law suit against SeaWorld. Attorney Patricia Sigman claims that SeaWorld is legally liable as it had portrayed the orca as human loving, and as a "huggable stuffed toy". She goes on to say that an inaccurate image had been given of this whale, when in fact, "he is extremely dangerous."

SeaWorld - Orlando / AZA / AMMPA

2002

Inside Edition's Nancy Glass is struck by a 500 pound dolphin when it leaps and falls short on top of her. Glass suffered permanent partial hearing loss and cervical injury.^{15, 16}

Blue Lagoon Island - Nassau

July 2002

Orcas: Splash (2nd incident), Orkid
Two orcas pull a 28 year old trainer into the tank. The trainer suffers a broken arm.⁵

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

July 2004

Orca: Ky

Twelve year old male orca Ky attacks his trainer, Steve Aibel, during a live show, belly flopping on top of him, and positioning himself between Aibel and the tank's exit ramp. The aggression lasts for several minutes before Aibel is rescued.¹⁷

SeaWorld - San Antonio / AZA / AMMPA



A marine mammal survey, commissioned by the US Marine Mammal Commission and conducted by UCLA in 2004, finds that more than half of marine mammal workers have been injured by the animals. More than one-third of the injuries are classified as severe - deep wounds, fractures, or requiring stitches.¹⁹

January 2008

Dolphin: Annie

An 11 year old bottlenose dolphin named Annie lands on top of three volunteers while attempting to leap over a limbo bar during a Swim with the Dolphin show. All three volunteers are injured and one woman is sent to the hospital.²³

Dolphin Academy - Curacao, Netherlands Antilles / EAAM



April 2008



Dolphin: Sharky

Thirty year old female dolphin, Sharky, collides in mid air with another dolphin while leaping during a live show performance. Sharky dies soon afterwards from traumatic head injuries. The other dolphin, Tyler, is moved to veterinary supervision.^{24, 25}

Discovery Cove - Orlando / AMMPA

January 2008

Orca: Halyn

A 2 year old, born in San Antonio, dies of acute necrotizing encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain caused by herpes.^{11, 12}

SeaWorld - San Antonio / AZA / AMMPA

September 2008

Orca: Ku

Captive born, female orca, Ku stops eating on July 23. Two months later she is found dead at the bottom of her tank, her skin inflamed by herpes.²⁶

Nagoya Port Aquarium

October 2004

A 49 year old man is hospitalized after jumping into a dolphin tank where a mother and baby dolphin are swimming.¹⁸

Miami Seaquarium / AMMPA

2006

A 4 year old dolphin dies from "severe acute trauma and secondary thoracic and abdominal hemorrhage."

SeaWorld - Orlando / AZA / AMMPA

October 2007

Orca: Tekoa

An orca crashes into trainer Claudia Vollhardt during rehearsal and drags her to the bottom of the tank, injuring Vollhardt's right lung and breaking her forearm in two places.²²

Loro Parque - Canary Islands, Spain / EAAM

November 2006

Orca: Orkid (2nd incident)

Eighteen year old female Orkid, grabs trainer Brian Rokeach by the leg and drags him to the bottom of the pool where he holds Rokeach for around 30 seconds. Rokeach suffers a torn ligament but is not hospitalized.²¹

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

2007

An 11 year old captive bred dolphin dies of acute hemorrhaging.

SeaWorld - Orlando / AZA / AMMPA

2005

Dolphin: Howard

A 23-year old male dolphin dies from brain hemorrhaging. In 1984 another female, Jeannie, age 24, died of the same cause.

Theater of the Sea - Islamorada, Florida / AMMPA

April 2007

Orca: Orkid (3rd incident)

Orkid knocks her trainer off a low wall while getting a sonogram. Trainer suffers minor injuries.

SeaWorld - San Diego / AZA / AMMPA

April 2008

A wild-caught dolphin dies from traumatic cervical vertebral fracture after just four years in captivity.

SeaWorld - Orlando / AZA / AMMPA

September 2008

Orca: Freya

Twenty-six year old female Freya pulls her trainer under water and pushes him during a live performance.

Marineland - Antibes, France



Sources



Dawn Brancheau and Tilikum, moments before her death.



Funeral services were held for Dawn Brancheau on March 1, 2010.

February 2010

Orca: Tilikum (3rd incident)

During a show in Shamu Stadium, Tilikum grabs trainer Dawn Brancheau in his mouth and drags her underwater. Despite Brancheau's efforts to escape, Tilikum rams her repeatedly, shakes her violently and prevents her from surfacing. The attack lasts 30 minutes. When Tilikum finally releases Brancheau from his jaws, rescuers must go back to retrieve her arm, which was dismembered. Chuck Tompkins, head of animal training at all SeaWorld parks, confirms that "because of Tilikum's size and involvement in two previous deaths, trainers weren't supposed to get in the water with him."^{5, 27}

SeaWorld - Orlando / AZA / AMMPA

December 2009

Orca: Keto

Veteran trainer, Alexis Martínez, is killed while rehearsing a Christmas show with Keto, a 14 year old male orca leased to the park by SeaWorld. Martínez is hit and drowned, unconscious underwater for several minutes, before the other trainers can rescue him. An autopsy was never done or has yet to be released.

Loro Parque - Canary Islands, Spain / EAAM



Alexis Martinez and Dawn Brancheau.

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