



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 26, 2010

## SeaWorld's Response to the Tragedy

The drowning death of Dawn Brancheau by a killer whale at Orlando's SeaWorld on Wednesday February 24 was an unimaginable tragedy. It has forced theme park visitors to come to terms with the difficulties and risks that animal trainers must face on a regular basis, all for the sake of research and entertainment.



SeaWorld has managed to emerge from this tragedy in a surprisingly positive light, as they have remained open and available to both their fans and their critics. Between SeaWorld's blog that offers first-hand updates from park employees and videos from Chuck Tompkins, head of animal training, SeaWorld has proven that they do not intend to hide away from this crisis.

In light of this tragedy, SeaWorld has elected to halt the use of Shamu's Twitter account, which usually contained entertaining updates from the perspective of Shamu, and was extremely popular.

Likewise, SeaWorld held another press conference today at 1 p.m. and addressed an array of questions. President and chief executive officer of SeaWorld Jim Atchison shared information regarding the company's review of the incident and plans for the killer-whale program at the three SeaWorld parks. According to Atchison, no animal is ever punished at SeaWorld and Tilikum is no exception. Procedures to deal with the animals are currently under review and will be heavily scrutinized; no "in water training" is to be done.

Despite the best efforts made by SeaWorld, hordes of spectators remain shocked at what they witnessed at the noon show on Wednesday afternoon. Tilikum, the star of the killer whale show that tragic afternoon, grabbed Brancheau by her long ponytail and dragged her underwater. The attempts made by workers to rescue Brancheau were ineffective. Witnesses say that they watched in horror as the whale charged through the water with Brancheau in its mouth.

One spectator recounts that the whale "took off really fast in the tank, and then he came back, shot up in the air, grabbed the trainer by the waist and started thrashing around, and one of her shoes flew off."

Tompkins claims that the whale gave no indication that there was anything wrong prior to the show. While the specifics of what prompted the event remains a mystery, Americans are asking why Tilikum was kept in captivity after having killed two others in previous years. Apparently, Tilikum's size prompted a rule that no trainers were supposed to get in the water with him, and only about a dozen of the 29 park trainers worked with him.

In 1991, Tilikum was among several other orcas responsible for the death of a trainer at SeaLand in British Columbia when a trainer lost her balance and fell in the pool. In 1999, Tilikum attacked a man



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that snuck into her tank after park hours. The bruised and scratched man was found lying draped over Tilikum, having died of hypothermia.

Fox News anchor and attorney Megyn Kelly discussed with Bill O'Reilly whether Brancheau's family has a valid lawsuit against SeaWorld. Kelly argues, "The problem for any potential litigants is that this woman knew the risks of working with a killer whale better than anyone. This is akin to astronauts who go up in a space shuttle and know there are risks."

SeaWorld has decided to keep Tilikum, but remains unsure as to whether Tilikum will perform again.



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