

Speak Out Against Goldfish Giveaways

The decision to have a companion animal is a serious responsibility, which requires planning and a commitment to their long-term care. It should not be based on how well you can toss a ping pong ball into a bowl. Goldfish are living, feeling creatures, just like any other animal. Even though we don't pet them, or play with them in the yard, we still have a responsibility to properly care for them. The lack of concern with which goldfish are given away at fairs and carnivals conveys a wanton disrespect for their lives, and an indifference to their suffering.



Improper Care

Because goldfish can be obtained very cheaply, vendors treat them like disposable commodities. According to one person who runs a fish distribution game, he gives away between 4,000 and 7,000 fish a week. After events with goldfish contests, bags of goldfish are often found tossed in the garbage. And in some cases, when the fair closes, the remaining goldfish are thrown in the dumpster by the vendor.



Goldfish often start their lives in overcrowded, dirty tanks full of parasites. They endure the stress of being moved to a dealer before being transported to an event. Once they are won by a contestant, they are carried around in a small plastic bag before finally arriving at their new home. The vibrations caused by the drive home are stressful for the goldfish. It breaks down their immune system, which can promote disease and result in death.

Proper Care

Goldfish won at carnivals are usually thought of more as a prize than as a pet. When a person brings home a goldfish from a carnival they have not planned for them and are not prepared to properly care for this animal. Goldfish can die from being put in chlorinated tap water, as well as from water that is bottled or distilled. A solution needs to be purchased that removes chlorine, measures acidity, and adds nutrients and minerals. In addition, the water should remain at about 70 degrees, and a filtering system should be placed in the fish's tank to remove waste. The sad reality is that people who win goldfish as prizes rarely have the appropriate home set up for them, and the fish usually soon perish.

Laws

Some states do have laws in place to ban giving away live animals at fairs and carnivals. In Maryland, it is unlawful to give away a live animal as a prize without approval from the Secretary of Agriculture. Doing so is a misdemeanor, punishable by up to \$500 (Maryland Code, section 10-610). Iowa, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Vermont have also made giving away goldfish at carnivals a criminal offense.

Environmental Concerns

In addition to humane concerns, laws banning the use of goldfish as prizes also exist for environmental reasons. After the novelty of bringing home a fish wears off, they are frequently discarded either in local waters, or flushed down the toilet. If they survive they can end up in public waters, and the consequences can be profound.

When goldfish are given enough space, such as in open waters, they can grow up to two feet and live for more than 25 years! Goldfish are a member of the carp family, and in the wild they often breed with other carp. These fish can carry diseases which can infect native fish. Released goldfish also compete for resources with native fish, and may even eat native fish eggs. They can quickly reproduce and with a voracious appetite they have been known to disrupt native species, which harms local ecosystems.

Oppose Live Animals As Prizes

If you know of an event where animals are to be awarded as prizes, find out if there are regulations or other restrictions on the practice, and contact the organizers and explain why it should not be allowed. If you need help with this, please contact Fish Feel. Try to enlist others to join you in protesting it. Your voice can be powerful! For example, because of all the calls that the New York State Fair received from



citizens concerned about the welfare of goldfish being given away, the Fair decided to prohibit such contests. If the events persist in allowing such contests, contact the event sponsors to express your disapproval. You can also contact the local humane society to request they check on the conditions in which the fish are being kept.

If you cannot get the practice stopped entirely, an alternative is to request that contest winners instead be given a certificate to receive a fish at a local store that sells them. This gives people the time to properly decide whether fish would be a good addition to their household, and to purchase the proper equipment, as well as learn what is involved in having companion fish. This method is currently carried out at the California State Fair, following public outcry over live animals being given away as prizes.