

# The New York Times

## Ohio Governor Signs Order Seeking to Curb Animal Cruelty

By TIMOTHY WILLIAMS

Published: October 21, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/22/us/ohio-governor-signs-order-seeking-to-curb-animal-cruelty.html>

Gov. John R. Kasich of Ohio signed an executive order on Friday that he said might have prevented the man accused of releasing dozens of tigers, lions and other animals this week from being allowed to keep the animals because of his history of animal cruelty and neglect.

The authorities say that the man, Terry Thompson, 62, of Zanesville, freed 56 exotic animals from their cages on Tuesday before fatally shooting himself in his driveway. Forty-nine of the animals, including 18 rare Bengal tigers and 17 lions, were subsequently cornered and shot by law enforcement officers, who said it was necessary to protect the public. Most of the animals had wandered no more than 500 yards from their cages.

Six other animals were taken to the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, and one, a snow monkey, was believed to have been eaten by one of the large cats.

Since the incident, Mr. Kasich, a Republican, has been criticized for not extending an emergency order signed last year by his Democratic predecessor, Ted Strickland, that restricted ownership of such animals.

On Friday, Mr. Kasich, who called it “a very complicated issue,” said his staff had discovered within the past few days that state animal humane officers were empowered to arrest people if they found evidence of animal cruelty. Mr. Kasich said it was not clear why that power had not been exercised in the case of Mr. Thompson.

The executive order Mr. Kasich signed Friday directs state agencies to increase inspections of places that may be housing exotic animals and establishes a telephone hot line for the public to report unsafe situations involving such animals.

The governor also said a state task force charged with developing new exotic animal rules would come up with “a framework” by Nov. 30 for a law that would then be submitted to the state legislature.

“When you see the kind of tragedy that happened in Muskingum County, you can’t look away from it,” the governor said.

Also Friday, the Muskingum County Sheriff's Office released police reports dating to 2004 detailing the department's interactions with Mr. Thompson and his wife, Marian.

Mr. Thompson was convicted of animal cruelty in 2005 and sentenced to six months' house arrest. County inspections of the Thompson reserve also found numerous instances of abuse and neglect, including cages that were unsanitary and too small; animals that had untreated parasites and injuries, including a tiger that had its tail torn off by another large cat or bear; animals that were malnourished; and cages secured only by nylon straps, rope or pieces of wire.

A 2008 visit revealed a bear and two lion cubs living inside a cage meant for a parrot. The cage had also been improperly secured.

"We have nothing to hide," Ms. Thompson told deputies serving a search warrant in April 2005, according to the police report. "We are just trying to save these animals. I'm going to put a stop to bringing in all these animals. I'm telling Terry, 'No more.' "

According to records, the couple owed at least \$68,000 in taxes and penalties to the I.R.S. and to Muskingum County and had two federal liens placed against them. The Thompsons, who friends say had marital problems, also told sheriff's deputies who responded to calls about escaped cows and horses grazing on neighbors' property that they loved their animals and treated them well.

Deputies said Ms. Thompson frequently told them that the couple took in animals no one else wanted, according to the reports.

Mr. Thompson was released from federal prison on Sept. 30 after serving a year and a day on illegal firearms charges.

###