

Docent Guidelines and Policies



As a docent you are representing the zoo. Here are some of the guidelines and policies that you should know about.

Your Role as a Zoo Docent

Enhancing zoo visitors' understanding and appreciation of animals and nature

- Advance the zoo's mission of connecting people with wildlife, inspiring caring for nature and advancing conservation actions
- Provide accurate information about San Francisco Zoo animals, exhibits and conservation Issues.
- Explain the various roles of the San Francisco Zoo in a positive manner and encourage public support
- Convey a positive image of the San Francisco Zoo to the public



Education is what you will be doing every day as a docent. Somebody will probably learn something new by visiting the zoo, even if they came there “just for fun”. Even the first zoos embraced their role of teaching the public about the natural history of animals they may never see in the wild. Today, zoos are not only many people's first chance to see and learn about the natural history of animals, but also a method to help the public understand why these species need to be conserved.

Your responsibilities include:

- Advance the Zoo's mission of connecting people with wildlife, inspiring caring for nature and advancing conservation actions
- Providing accurate information about San Francisco Zoo animals, exhibits and conservation issues. These conservation issues could be about the plight of the specific animal the visitor is viewing or it might include ways the visitor can get involved to help.
- Explaining the various roles of the San Francisco Zoo in a positive manner and encouraging public support
- Conveying a positive image of the San Francisco Zoo to the public.

Docents are never allowed “behind the scenes” without permission from the keeper or staff person responsible for the area. This permission may not come from another volunteer nor be solicited by the docent. Docents should not take family or friends behind the scenes.

Docents are provisional for the first year- until the anniversary of the first date of their docent training class. Provisional docents must fulfill all scheduled assignments during the provisional period to be considered for Active Docent status.

Docent Uniform



- Zoo Docent Vest worn on the outside of all clothing
- Non-patterned top of white, black, zoo green or shades of brown worn under vest
- Plain pants, skirts or knee-length walking shorts of black, tan or shades of brown may be worn
- Hats should be plain or have the current Zoo logo
- NO logos from other institutions!!

Docents must wear a 'Docent Uniform' when participating in educational and interpretive activities.

The docent vest should be worn on the outside of any clothing. In case of rain and you do not want your vest to get wet, there are some see-through ponchos available in the Docent Lounge.

Under the vest you may wear any shirt or jacket that is non-patterned white, black, Zoo green, or shades of brown.

Similarly, plain pants, skirts or knee-length walking shorts of black, tan or shades of brown may be worn. Absolutely no blue jeans or sweat pants are to be worn.

Hats should be plain or have the current Zoo logo.

Nothing but the docent nametag, Docent Council approved pins and the **"Ask Me"** button may be worn with the uniform. You are allowed to have one animal button that the San Francisco Zoo has made.

If you forget your vest on your scheduled day, you may borrow a vest to be returned after your shift.

No logos from other institutions should be worn.

Docent Hours

10 hours per month:
(6 hours of interpretive, 4 hours of benefit)



- 6 interpretive hours per month
- 4 benefit hours per month
- 4 Continuing Education (CE) Units per year
- Attend one of the two General Meetings each year, spring or fall. A General Meeting counts as one CE credit

Scheduling is done according to your availability and preferences. Typically you will pick one day of the week that you prefer to work on and give your preferences for that day during the month. Once a month you will be asked for your conflicts or the preferred days you would like to be scheduled for the following month. Docents are responsible for looking at the schedule and know when they are to come in and when they have tours or are to take out biofacts.

Active docents are required to complete a total of **6 interpretive hours per month**. This can be accomplished by either 3 interpretive assignments of 2 hours each month or 2 interpretive assignments of 3 hours each month. Interpretive hours include touring, bone cart or exhibit assignments and roaming where you are interacting with visitors and providing information about the animals and exhibits. Giving a personal tour to your friends does not count toward these 6 interpretive hour. Your interpretive hours are your first priority when planning your hours at the zoo. Docents are required to interpret using biofact carts/bags at least once per month or as indicated on the monthly schedule. Docents are encouraged to use them more frequently.

If giving a tour, Docents should wait thirty (30) minutes after the scheduled arrival time for a tour. After 30 minutes, if the tour has not arrived, they should check with the Education Department to determine tour status. Interpretive hours can be filled on the same day by roaming as an alternative.

Active Docents are responsible for recording their hours worked in the binder provided in the Docent Lounge. This will be used to generate the permanent record of attendance and fulfillment of the hour requirements in the database.

In addition to interpretive assignments active docents are expected to contribute **4 benefit hours each month**. These hours are doing anything that benefit the Docent Council in particular or the Zoo in general. Hours include such things as tour preparation & paper work, or helping with special projects done at home, hours spent at the General Meetings, Zoo classes or lectures, volunteering at Events, helping with mailings, DEC service, etc.

Active touring docents are also required to accumulate a total of 4 Continuing Education Units (CE) yearly. One unit will be obtained by mandatory attendance at either of the General Meetings in the Spring or Fall. The remaining three units may be obtained by participating in any combination of the following: Brown Bags, Zoo Lectures or Keeper talks, New Docent Class Training, Special Zoo/Docent Trainings, or presenting a Brown Bag talk or writing a Docentinel article from a trip or a class. The Docentinel is the Docent's bimonthly newsletter.

What if I can't make my shift?



- You must find your own replacement for any scheduled tours
- Call the Education Department with any changes to the schedule
- In the case of incremental weather, call the Education Department for Zoo closure or tour cancellations

If you are unable to come in on an assigned tour date, you must notify the Education Department before the day of the tour with a replacement docent and info on when you will make up your hours. Notification of illness or emergencies on the day of a scheduled tour must be made to the Education Department by telephone as early as possible.

A docent with a non-touring assignment must also notify the Education Department that they cannot come in on that day and when they will be making up their hours.

In the event of inclement weather or notification of a natural disaster (Tsunami, etc), docents should always call the Education Department to verify the Zoo is open and to see if any scheduled tours have been cancelled. Remember that unless the group cancels, we give tours rain or shine; if you are scheduled you must complete the tour. We do appreciate docents working their non-touring shifts in inclement weather and there are a number of protected areas where you can station yourself. But if you can't make a non-touring shift because of the bad weather, and the Zoo is still open, you still need to notify Education Department by either phone or email including when you plan to make up the shift.

Touring Gorilla World

- Remove vest and keep it out of sight while in exhibit
- Give your talk to a group before you go to exhibit
- Leave Gorilla World if silverback seems agitated.
- Avoid the low window station on the far end of the exhibit
- Goal is not for silverback to like or acknowledge you but for him to be indifferent or oblivious to your presence



NOTE: All docents when visiting Gorilla World should remove their vests and keep them out of sight while they are around the exhibit. The docents should not spend any significant time at the gorilla exhibit. They should move along to different viewing stations and avoid the window station all together. **Do not engage silverback!**

Do not bring rowdy tour groups to GW.

Do not walk up and stand in front of him; view him at a distance. (If he is at the first viewing station on the east or west side of GW when you arrive, do not stop; walk past him and view him from the other side of the grotto.)

If you are giving a tour, stop before you reach GW and prepare your group. Give the group some basic facts about gorillas so when you get to the viewing station the tour members can enjoy observing the gorillas and you can then answer specific questions. This preparatory stop would be most beneficial if you have a large group.

Please acquaint yourself with the full set of Gorilla World Procedures in the Docent Notebook under Guidelines and Protocols.

SAFETY at the ZOO

What do I do when...

- Lost child
- First Aid
- Major Medical
Emergency
- Earthquake
- Code Red



Each year, all volunteers will have safety training.

You should have your cell programed to contact education and/or security. All your docent calls should go through education first. If for some reason, they are not responding, you should go through security.

If you have found a **lost child**, notify education, via cell phone and give them your location and the description of the child (name, age) and, if possible, the name of the adult the child has become separated from. Await instructions from Security before you move from your location. Do not hand child over to another guest. Stay with the child until a zoo employee or security has arrived.

If you find a parent/guardian who has lost a child, contact security via cell phone and give them your location, last place child was seen, and a description of the child (name, age, gender, physical description). Also share how long the child has been missing. Await instructions from Security before changing locations and stay with the parent/guardian.

First Aid

If someone is requesting minor **first aid** (band-aid, ice pack, etc), contact Education/Security via cell phone and give them your location and the request. Security has a mobile first aid kit that they will bring to the individual's location. Do not offer any opinions.

If someone is experiencing a **major medical emergency**, contact Education/Security via cell phone and give them your location and specify the type of emergency (whether the guest is conscious or not, whether or not the guest is requesting an ambulance, etc. Stay near your cell phone for follow up information and instructions from Security.

Earthquake: Duck/Cover/Hold and, if safe, go to the Playfield Lawn where Education or other staff will meet you with further instructions. If ANY Zoo staff directs you otherwise, follow their instructions.

Code Red: Listen to the announcement or instructions from ANY Zoo staff and seek an indoor location to shelter in place. While the first priority is your safety, if you can safely direct guests to the nearest indoor location, please do so. Listen carefully to your radio and any further announcements. Shelter in place until the "All Clear" is called.

It is important to sign in each time you will be out in the zoo. Zoo staff use this information when there is an emergency to ensure that all staff and volunteers are accounted for. Don't forget to sign out when you leave the zoo so they are not looking for you.

What is the DEC?



The Docent Executive Committee (DEC) provides the leadership and direction for all Active and Sustaining Docents. It is made up of seven elected Active Docents with alternating terms of two years

In 1968, the **Zoo Docent Council** program was established. The Zoo Docent Council is the collection of all docents with a primary purpose of providing educational services in conjunction with Zoo's education department. The Docent Executive Committee oversees this docent program and provides leadership and direction for all docents as well as input to the education department. The DEC is involved in recruiting and training new docents, providing continuing education for current docents and publishing the bimonthly newsletter, *"The Docentinel"*. The money docents raise is used for animal enrichment and supporting the Zoo in any way they can. The DEC also organizes special field trips to other nature-oriented organizations and runs the two general meetings each year. Participation at one of these meetings is a requirement in being a docent. These general meetings are an important part of learning about the direction of the zoo as well as the docent program.

What is the AZADV?



The Association of Zoo and Aquarium Docents and Volunteers (AZADV) is a growing international not-for-profit association whose purpose is to facilitate communication and the exchange of information between zoo and aquarium docents and volunteers.

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You should consider joining as an individual member. Benefits of an individual membership include: an information network, a subscription to the newsletter *Symbiosis*, continuing education workshops, regional & national conferences, AZADV merchandise and AZADV sponsored international & domestic travel opportunities. Each year the Docent Council sends one voting delegate to the conference.

Docent Information

- Corresponds to the Guidelines and Protocol section of the Docent Notebook
- Includes Docent Guidelines, Gorilla World Procedures and Emergency Procedures



Thank you for volunteering!

