

Elephant spread TB to workers at Tenn. sanctuary

February 16 2011, By MIKE STOBBE , AP Medical Writer

(AP) -- A tuberculosis outbreak among workers at a Tennessee elephant sanctuary in 2009 is being blamed on one of the pachyderms, even though some of the employees didn't have close contact with the animal.

Elephants can carry TB, and there have been reports of them spreading it to people who touch them. In this instance, TB spread to eight employees, though three of them didn't work directly with the elephant, according to a report released Wednesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The three worked in an administrative building next to an elephant barn at the refuge in Hohenwald, about 85 miles southwest of Nashville. The 2,700-acre Elephant Sanctuary was founded in 1995 as a place for old, sick and rescued elephants.

One elephant in the barn had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. Investigators believe the TB bacteria spread through the air when the elephant sneezed, or through pressure washing or dust from sweeping the barn.

The eight employees tested positive on a skin test and are receiving treatment, but are not sick or hazardous to others, sanctuary officials said in a statement Wednesday.

The report from officials at the CDC, the Tennessee Department of Health and Vanderbilt University is in the CDC journal, Emerging

Infectious Diseases. The authors call for better methods for diagnosing TB in elephants and more measures to protect employees from infection.

This week, officials with the sanctuary filed court papers claiming its co-founder and former CEO, Carol Buckley, created a hostile work environment and was lax about workers' health at the site.

Sanctuary officials claimed Buckley failed to implement infection controls for elephant caregivers as regulators suggested before the workers tested positive for TB.

The claim was in response to a lawsuit filed by Buckley in October. Buckley - who was fired last year - is seeking \$500,000 in damages and visitation rights to one of the sanctuary's elephants.

More information: Report:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/index.htm>

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