



Polar Bear Care Demonstration: Training

How to Use This Document

The following text is similar to what a presenter will say during a public demonstration. You may follow along, but please note that the exact wording and sequence will vary depending on staff and animal activity. Feel free to ask the presenter questions after the program. Thank you for joining us today!

Pre-Demonstration Announcement

Hello! In a few minutes, Animal Care staff will open the glass doors and offer a training session for a polar bear. If you are interested in learning more, please find a comfortable spot at least one tile space away from the viewing window. You may take a seat at the front or stand behind the people who are already seated. Please keep all hands, arms, legs and feet off of the barrier at all times. The demonstration will start shortly and will last five to ten minutes. If you have any questions before we begin, please let me know.

Introduction

Welcome to Walter Family Arctic Tundra at Lincoln Park Zoo! My name is _____, and I'm with the Learning team. During the training session today, the keeper will be working with a polar bear. It's always the polar bear's choice to



participate. We might see the bear choose to leave at any time or to not come down for training at all. If the bear participates, you'll see a variety of behaviors that reveal how polar bears survive in the extremes of the Arctic.

There are two polar bears at Lincoln Park Zoo, Siku and Talini. Depending on which bear has access to which part of the habitat today, you might see either or both of them.



Siku (left) is a male polar bear born in 2009 at Toledo Zoo and Aquarium. **Talini** (right) is a female born at Detroit Zoo in 2004. One of the easiest way to tell them apart is size. Male polar bears, like Siku, are much larger than females, like Talini.

It's important to make training a positive experience for any animal so they will choose to participate. To accomplish this, keepers use positive reinforcement to reward specific behaviors. The rewards are part of the bears' veterinarian-approved diet. They can include fish, meat, vegetables, and hard boiled eggs. Many of the behaviors give the keeper a way to check on the bears' health and make sure everything on their body looks the way it should.

This process is an essential part of animal care here at Lincoln Park Zoo, but it's also a great opportunity for us to observe how polar bears are adapted for Arctic life. The average temperature in winter is 22 degrees below zero in the Arctic, with lows sometimes reaching 60 below. The freezing cold is often accompanied by fierce winds. But in the summer, the Arctic is more mild. At the southern edge of their range, polar bears sometimes experience summer days in the 70s. Their bodies are adapted for swimming

and hunting in the summer and staying warm in the extreme winters.

Behaviors You Might Observe

During today's session, you may see some of the following behaviors that highlight important adaptations and help keep the bears healthy.

Follow keeper from point A to point B: Keepers often encourage animals to move during training for exercise and weight management.

Lean body against the mesh: Thick fur keeps polar bears warm in cold air, while 4.5-inch-thick blubber keeps them warm in cold water. Together, the fur and blubber maintain a body temperature of 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the same as ours!

Open Mouth: Sharp, widely spaced canine teeth help polar bears catch and hold seals, their most common prey. At Lincoln



Park Zoo, we provide a diet of fish and meat, not seals. It doesn't get as cold here as it does in the Arctic, so polar bears living in Chicago don't need the same high-fat diet of seals that wild polar bears must consume to build up a thick layer of blubber.

Stand up: Polar bears are the largest land-based carnivore. A male standing upright on his hind legs can be eight to ten feet tall. Females are only slightly smaller, measuring six to eight feet tall when standing upright. Male polar bears weigh between 775 and 1,300 pounds, while female polar bears weigh between 330 and 650 pounds.



Paw on mesh: Polar bears have very large paws that not only help them travel through the Arctic, but also allow them to hunt for seals. Their paws are eight to twelve inches across. That's the same



size as a dinner plate! When you're eating dinner tonight, think about the large paws and long, curved claws that polar bears use to catch their meals. Seals are able to swim much faster than polar bears, so polar bears use frozen ocean water—also called sea ice—to stalk their prey. When seals come up for air through holes in the ice, polar bears pull them out of the water with their strong claws and teeth.

Crouch low to the ground:

Walking on slippery sea ice can be tricky for such a large mammal, so polar bears often spread out their body weight by getting low to the ground. In the wild, this can help them move on thin sea ice. In a



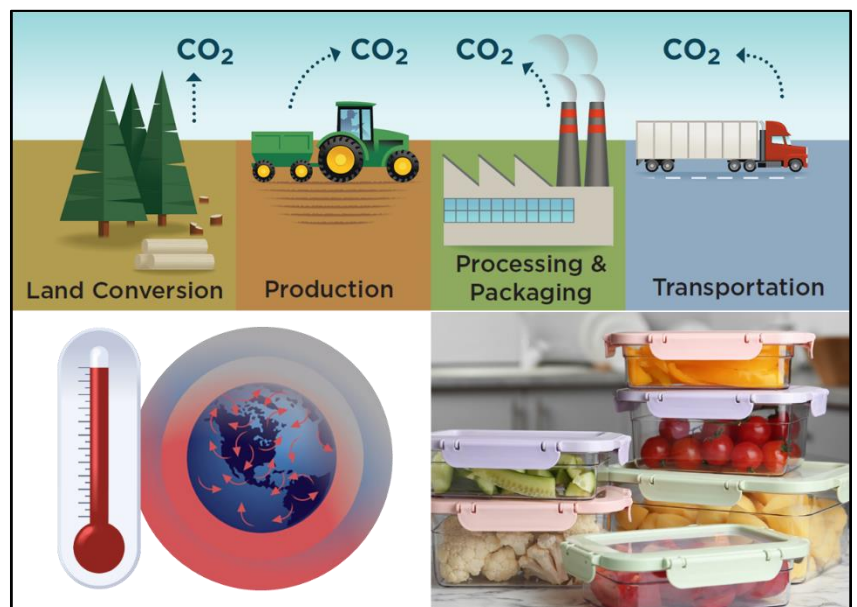
normal year, some sea ice remains in the Arctic through the summer months. Thicker sea ice forms in the fall and winter then melts back to seawater in the late spring. But climate change leads to Arctic sea ice forming later and melting earlier. Fewer months of thick sea ice makes it more difficult for polar bears to hunt.

Climate Change

What makes polar bears strong in the Arctic also makes them vulnerable to the effects of climate change. We release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere whenever we burn fossil fuels, like coal and gasoline. Rampant carbon dioxide builds up in the atmosphere, acting like a thick

blanket that traps heat around the world and disrupts the climate. This blanket of carbon dioxide is already causing average temperatures in the Arctic to increase. As the Arctic gets warmer, the sea ice season becomes shorter. That makes it more difficult for polar bears to hunt enough seals to survive. If warming around the world continues at the present rate, polar bears may not have a place to call home in the future.

Before it's too late, we have to protect the Arctic and the animals that live there. One thing that can help is reducing food waste. It takes a lot of energy to produce food and get it to the people who eat it, and most of that energy comes from burning fossil fuels. But in the United States, about a third of all the food produced goes uneaten. That means we're using more



energy than we need to. By doing things that reduce food waste—like storing and using leftovers—you can help slow down climate change and preserve the Arctic for future generations.

Conclusion

It looks like the keeper is wrapping up. I hope you've enjoyed learning about training, polar bears, and the Arctic. I encourage you to explore the rest of Walter Family Arctic Tundra. There are other viewing points where you might be able to observe the bears. Once again, my name is _____, and I'm with the Learning team. Please find me if you have any questions. Thanks for being here! Your support helps us conserve wildlife.