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**POLAR BEAR ‘PAW OF APPROVAL’ AWARD TO HONOR PIERCE COUNTY BUSINESSES
THAT HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT STRIDES TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**

TACOMA, Wash. - Protecting polar bears can begin right here at home.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium wants to reward local businesses for their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thereby helping reduce the effects of climate change that threatens the sea ice on which these magnificent mammals hunt.

Nominations are now being accepted for the brand new Polar Bear “Paw of Approval” award, which recognizes environmental stewardship in this area by Pierce County businesses.



The award program is a joint effort of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Sustainable Tacoma Commission and Polar Bears International.

It’s open to private and public-sector Pierce County businesses that are taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The deadline for applying is March 22.

To receive a “Paw of Approval,” a business must demonstrate a three-to-five year record of measurable reductions in carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and/or fluorinated gases.

“This is important, pressing work, and businesses thousands of miles from the Arctic can make a tangible difference in the race to save polar bears,” said John Garner, conservation and education manager at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

Two local businesses will receive awards this year, following judging by members of the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Green Team and the Sustainable Tacoma Commission.

Polar bears are a threatened species, and sea ice is crucial to their existence. It's the platform from which they hunt the seals that sustain their lives.

Unchecked destruction of their hunting grounds due to climate change could bring about the extinction of these largest of land carnivores.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium long has aided polar bear research and conservation efforts. The zoo parking lots and drives are "idle free" zones, in which motorists are asked to turn their engines off while waiting for someone in order to reduce tailpipe emissions.

"The 'Paw of Approval' award program is another piece of our longstanding commitment in this area," Garner said. "We're excited that the 'Paw of Approval' program will not only reward local businesses for their efforts but will encourage others to curb their greenhouse gas emissions, too."

Each "Paw of Approval" winner will receive a plaque from Polar Bears International; will be recognized in the zoo's ZooPoints publication; named in a news release as a leader in environmental stewardship; invited to exhibit at the zoo's annual Earth Day event; and treated to a special breakfast with the zoo's three polar bears, Boris, Blizzard and Glacier.

A nomination form may be accompanied by up to five pages of additional information, including photographs or other material. Self-nominations are encouraged. The form is on the zoo website, www.pdza.org.

Nominators will be asked to describe actions taken; provide details on the amount of reduction that has occurred; and explain why the company should be recognized as a community leader in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

For more information, contact John Garner at john.garner@pdza.org or 253-404-3688.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).