

THE U.S. #IVORYCRUSH AT TIMES SQUARE

Destruction of Confiscated Elephant Ivory in Times Square: *Questions and Answers*

Why is the United States destroying elephant ivory?

We want to send a clear message that the United States will not tolerate ivory trafficking and is committed to protecting elephants from extinction. The toll these crimes are taking on elephant populations, particularly in Africa, is at its worst in decades. The United States believes that it is important to destroy ivory seized as a result of law enforcement investigations and at international ports of entry. Destroying this ivory tells criminals who engage in poaching and trafficking that the United States will take all available measures to disrupt and prosecute those who prey on, and profit from, the deaths of these magnificent animals.

Has the U.S. Government ever done this before?

Yes. On November 14, 2013, at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) National Wildlife Property Repository on Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge near Denver, Colorado, we destroyed our 6-ton stock of confiscated elephant ivory in our first ivory crush. The Service had never before destroyed large quantities of ivory.

Our second ivory crush will take place on June 19, 2015, in Times Square, New York City, to destroy ivory from seizures and cases that have been resolved since 2013.

New York State Senator Brad Hoylman requested the Service's assistance to host an ivory crush in New York City. We believe this is a good opportunity to raise awareness about the illegal ivory



Photo: Samples of seized ivory. Credit: USFWS

trade and agreed to crush approximately one ton of ivory that was confiscated during a multi-year undercover operation that resulted in 10 convictions. The last defendant in the case was sentenced in 2014.

Why isn't ivory destroyed when it is seized?

In the United States, pieces of elephant ivory and other seized illegal wildlife products are maintained as evidence until criminal and civil cases are concluded. Once cases are resolved, the Service uses items that are examples of illegal wildlife trade for educational purposes and for training our law enforcement officers and detection dogs. In 2013, we had accumulated far more elephant

ivory than we needed for these purposes and decided to destroy that stockpile as a demonstration of our commitment to combating wildlife trafficking.

Have other countries destroyed ivory stockpiles?

Yes. The following lists the governments and the year they destroyed ivory: Kenya, 1989, 1991, 2011, 2015; Zambia, 1992; United Arab Emirates, 1992, 2015; Gabon, 2012; Philippines, 2013; China, 2014, 2015; Chad, 2014; France, 2014; Belgium 2014; Hong Kong 2014; Ethiopia 2015; and Congo, 2015.

Why doesn't the Service sell the ivory?

The Service does not sell confiscated wildlife or products derived from endangered and threatened species. Illegal ivory trade is driving a dramatic increase in African elephant poaching, threatening the very existence of elephants in Africa. It is extremely difficult to differentiate legally acquired ivory from ivory derived from elephant poaching. Our criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts have clearly shown that legal ivory trade can serve as a cover for illegal trade. Therefore, selling seized ivory and allowing it to enter the marketplace could mask trade in illegal ivory and contribute to increased elephant poaching. Similarly, seized ivory in African countries can also not be traded: the African elephant listing under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the treaty regulating international trade in endangered species, forbids seized ivory and ivory of unknown origin from entering international trade.

Won't destroying this ivory make elephant ivory rarer, thus driving up the cost and creating a greater incentive for poaching?

Seized ivory would never be made available to the market because it is illegal to trade seized ivory. Its destruction has no impact on the overall supply and does not create any incentive for poaching. By demonstrating our commitment to combat poaching and illegal trade, and to arrest and prosecute people who engage in these activities, we are providing a strong disincentive to poachers and wildlife trafficking networks around the world.

Why did the Service decide to crush the ivory instead of burning it?

Ivory is very resistant to burning, and typically still requires crushing to break it down into pieces small enough to be of no commercial value. Crushing from the beginning is thus more efficient for destroying ivory. Crushing also eliminates air quality concerns and fire risks that could be associated with an ivory "burn".

In the future, will the Service destroy forfeited ivory?

Yes. However, the Service will retain small amounts of ivory for use in conservation outreach and education as well as for investigative and forensic purposes such as training our wildlife law enforcement officers and detection dogs, and for partner law enforcement agencies (such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection). We look forward to a time when no one will purchase ivory, the poaching and illegal trade ends, and ivory remains where it belongs, on live elephants.

About the Ivory:

How much elephant ivory will be destroyed?

The Service will destroy approximately one ton of elephant ivory. The ivory to be destroyed includes full tusks, carved tusks, hundreds of smaller carvings, and other objects.

How did the Service acquire this ivory?

The vast majority of the ivory to be crushed was seized by Service agents from a Philadelphia store in 2009. On June 4, 2014, Victor Gordon, the store's owner, was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment, to be followed by 2 years of supervised release, for smuggling elephant ivory into the United States. As part of that sentence, the court ordered Gordon to pay a fine of \$7,500 and to forfeit \$150,000, along with the approximately one ton of elephant ivory



Above: African elephant.

Credit: Nick Turland CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

that was seized by agents from Gordon's Philadelphia store in April 2009.

The ivory crushed in 2013 was seized and forfeited to the Service as a result of the Service's criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts between the late 1980s and our first ivory crush on November 14, 2013.

What types of crimes were committed in connection with these seizures?

The ivory to be crushed in New York's Times Square was mostly seized from the [*United States vs. Victor Gordon*](#) case.

The ivory crushed in 2013 was confiscated for violations of various laws and regulations. Some was smuggled into the United States in large quantities; intercepted on its way out of the country or being unlawfully sold in interstate commerce; arrived in the United States without the appropriate permits; or was brought back by travelers who did not know about (or did not follow) wildlife laws and regulations.

Laws violated in connection with ivory seizures usually include the Endangered Species Act, which is the implementing legislation for CITES in

the United States, the African Elephant Conservation Act, or the Lacey Act.

How many dead elephants does this amount of ivory represent?

It is difficult to estimate this number with any certainty. Using the standard estimate that on average, tusks from one elephant weigh 10 kilograms or 22 pounds, at least 90 elephants were killed for one ton of ivory. However, while individual tusks can help us estimate the number of dead elephants, 10 bracelets could represent one elephant or several. In addition, as younger and younger elephants are killed, the tusk weight per elephant decreases, making the number of dead elephants likely to be even higher. The two crushes combined easily represent at least 1,700 elephants.

What is the value of this ivory?

Because this ivory was seized in connection with violations of U.S. conservation laws and regulations, it cannot legally be sold in the United States. We consider it to be contraband that has no market value. Similarly, ivory that is seized in Africa has no commercial value because under the current CITES African elephant listing, seized ivory and ivory of unknown origin cannot enter international trade.

What will be done with the ivory once it is destroyed?

The ivory crushed in 2013 is still secured by the Service. In 2014, the Service launched a "Crushed Ivory Design Challenge" calling on the public to submit ideas for a compelling, thought provoking, and informative display to increase awareness about the threats that poaching and illegal trade pose to elephants and other at-risk species. Our goal is to use the crushed ivory to raise awareness, reduce the demand for illegal wildlife products, and ultimately protect wildlife from senseless killing and illegal trade. The Design Challenge closed on March 31, 2015, and submissions are currently under review by a panel of experts. The ivory crushed in Times Square will remain secured by the Service and will be added to the ivory crushed in 2013 for use in the Design Challenge.

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