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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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CALIFORNIA GAINS CONTROL OF 'MILKSHAKES'

SAN MATEO, CA – California has gained control of the 'milkshaking' problem, according to data supplied Thursday to the California Horse Racing Board by Dr. Rick Arthur, chairman of the industry committee that oversees testing for excess alkalizing agents at the state's thoroughbred racetracks.

Milkshaking is the practice of loading horses with bicarbonate in order to reduce the build up of lactic acid and delay the onset of muscle fatigue. As other states implement testing for total carbon dioxide (TCO₂) to detect the practice of milkshaking, they all are playing catch up with California, which instituted the first such testing program one year ago and identified milkshaking as a serious problem last summer when the racetracks intensified the testing during the Del Mar meet.

"California has the most comprehensive and aggressive testing for bicarbonate levels of any jurisdiction in the country," noted CHRB Chairman John Harris.

Even as Dr. Arthur announced that two trainers at Bay Meadows recently had horses test high for TCO₂, he described this as an "anomaly," noting they were the first high tests in California since the industry got tough with violators in February by requiring all horses in their care to go to a detention facility the day before they race. All horses in the care of the two Bay Meadows violators – Jamey Ray Thomas and Ray Thomas (father and son) – will begin the 30-day detention period Friday.

In his presentation to the Board, Arthur said only eight horses have exceeded the permitted threshold for TCO₂ at Santa Anita Park, Golden Gate Fields, and Bay Meadows since December 26, 2004. During that period, 6,099 blood samples were tested, meaning about one-tenth of 1 percent of the horses tested high.

"There is no question we are winning the battle," said Arthur. "During the first four days of the Del Mar meet last summer, 24 percent of the horses tested high. These two recent cases at Bay Meadows tell us that some trainers still haven't gotten the message, but we have their attention now."

To further illustrate his point that California has gained the upper hand on this problem, Arthur noted that the number of borderline tests that are just below the permitted level have dropped significantly.

"We chart every horse and we can see that overall levels of TCO₂ have dropped across the board," said Arthur. "This tells us that trainers do have control of the levels. And they don't want to mess with the system now that violators are being publicly identified and dealt with."

“In Southern California, it has been five weeks since the last positive, and the near misses have been dropping significantly. The situation in Northern California appears to be an anomaly. Maybe they thought we weren’t paying attention to the north. Well, now they know. We’ve talked to these trainers and addressed the situation. We are confident we have things under control. Regardless, we are going to keep testing every horse in the state until there is no problem whatsoever and the number of high tests is zero.”

Arthur heads a program to enforce the conditions of a contract that was entered into by the California Thoroughbred Trainers, Thoroughbred Owners of California, and racetracks. This is a stopgap measure instituted by the industry until a new regulation adopted by the CHRB is in place and the Board takes over the TCO2 testing program. However, that regulation cannot take effect until companion legislation is enacted into law this year.

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