

1010 Hurley Way, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916) 263-6000
Fax (916) 263-6042

CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD

Los Alamitos Race Course
4961 E. Katella Avenue
Los Alamitos, CA 90720

Contact: Mike Marten
(714) 820-2748
Cell: (714) 240-1870
Fax (714) 821-6232

CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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CHAIRMAN CALLS SPECIAL MEETING CONCERNING SANTA ANITA

SACRAMENTO, CA – The California Horse Racing Board will conduct a special meeting by teleconference Tuesday to consider allowing the Los Angeles Turf Club to move some or all of its racing dates to Hollywood Park if the drainage problem that forced LATC to cancel races at Santa Anita Park on Saturday is not quickly resolved.

Santa Anita replaced its dirt track with the synthetic Cushion Track surface this year, and like the other synthetic tracks at Hollywood Park, Del Mar, and Golden Gate Fields, the Santa Anita engineered surface includes a vertical, piped, underground drainage system. However, problems with the Cushion Track surface at Santa Anita are preventing the drainage system from functioning properly, resulting in unsuitable racing conditions during heavy rains.

“As chairman of the California Horse Racing Board, I am calling this meeting at the request of Santa Anita to amend their license application to permit them to run races in Inglewood if that becomes necessary, which hopefully it won’t,” said Richard B. Shapiro. “It will be a telephonic meeting, accessible to the public at specific locations.

“If the problem is something that cannot be corrected reasonably quickly, and if it is going to take weeks to get Santa Anita back in shape for racing, then I certainly as one individual commissioner would advocate that we as a Board adopt an emergency measure, so that we would be able to shift racing over to Hollywood Park until the Santa Anita track is once again suitable for racing.”

Chairman Shapiro said he has been in contact with executives at Santa Anita and Hollywood Park, and “everyone agrees we need to take whatever action is necessary for the welfare of our industry.”

The Board issued a mandate last year requiring all California racetracks offering four weeks or more of continuous thoroughbred racing to install a synthetic surface.

“We issued this mandate after we held a number of study sessions to which we invited everyone in the industry to participate and interview the various vendors interesting in installing their surfaces in California,” explained the chairman. “We took this very bold step because we were seeing too many equine injuries, too many equine fatalities, and declining field sizes. After months of deliberation and public comment, the Board adopted the mandate. At the time the mandate was approved, all segments of the industry were unanimously in support of the Board’s action.

“I still believe in our decision. These synthetic surfaces, despite their newness and the learning curve to properly maintain them, have contributed to a nearly 50-percent decrease in equine racing fatalities. And I believe we also will see a decrease in fatalities and injuries during training as well. Certainly the data from Del Mar would support that. Additionally, field sizes in both Northern and Southern California have grown since those surfaces were installed, which in turn has stimulated more wagering on California racing. At Santa Anita right now we have a specific problem with one track, which should not be an indictment of synthetic surfaces.”

CHRB Vice Chairman John Harris commented, “Let’s not view this temporary cancellation of racing at Santa Anita as any sort of indictment of synthetic tracks in general. These tracks are being proven every day to be working and have kept a great many horses sounder than they would be without them. Northern California received far more rain than the south, yet the Tapeta track there is still getting excellent comments from horsemen and fans. Let’s all work together to get through the Santa Anita challenges. I am very pleased that Hollywood Park has offered the use of their track if a longer-term fix is needed at Santa Anita. We are fortunate that a good option is available.”

The meeting will commence at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, January 8. The meeting and teleconference locations, each of which will be accessible to the public, are as follows: 5000 N. Parkway Calabasas, Suite 210, Calabasas; CHRB Headquarters Conference Room, 1010 Hurley Way, Suite 300, Sacramento; Hollywood Park Turf Club Board Room, 1050 S. Prairie Avenue, Inglewood; Golden Gate Fields Administrative Office Conference Room, 1100 E. Shore Highway, Albany; 220 West 20th Avenue, San Mateo; University of California School of Law, Boalt Hall, Office 431 North, Berkeley; 23300 West Oakland Avenue, Coalinga; and Santa Anita Park Conference Room, 285 W. Huntington Drive, Arcadia.

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