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## CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD



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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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## CHRB COMMITTEE FOCUSES ON RACETRACK SAFETY

SACRAMENTO, CA – A California Horse Racing Board committee is developing rules, policies, and practices to promote the health and safety of horses and their riders through a number of initiatives, most significantly a proposed \$1 million-plus undertaking in conjunction with the University of California at Davis to clearly identify the reasons for the unacceptable numbers of fatalities and injuries among racehorses.

The members of the CHRB Medication and Track Safety Committee – Commissioners Bo Derek (chairperson) and John Harris – convened a public meeting April 8 to discuss a broad range of proposals that all shared the common theme of protecting horses. These included:

- A joint proposal for a racetrack safety program for equine welfare and injury prevention by the J.D. Wheat Veterinary Orthopedic Research Laboratory and the California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory System in concert with the CHRB Postmortem Program. Led by Dr. Susan Stover, an internationally recognized expert in the field of racehorse injuries, the goals of the program would be to determine the reasons for death and injuries among racehorses and to share that information with the racing industry to develop prevention strategies. The annual cost of this program would be in excess of \$1 million from the CHRB budget, which is entirely funded by horsemen and racetracks, not the California General Fund. A presentation on this proposed program is planned for the April 28 meeting of the full Board at Hollywood Park.
- A proposed rule to void a claim (purchase) if the horse suffers a fatality during or immediately after the race or if the horse is placed on the Veterinarian's List as unsound or lame. The goal is to discourage the running of compromised horses. The list of reasons for voiding claims could be expanded by future regulatory amendments if this initial step is successful.
- Proposed changes in penalties for overages of phenylbutazone and flunixin in conjunction with a companion regulatory amendment to lower the authorized levels of these non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications at race time. The levels are being

lowered in order to eliminate the possibility of these medications masking any soundless problems with horses examined the morning of the race.

- A proposal to transfer veterinary medical records of horses undergoing postmortem examinations. Providing the most recent six months of veterinary medical history would allow for the correlation of postmortem data with medical records to look for causal relationships.
- A separate proposal to provide the same veterinary medical history to the new owners of claimed horses, which would help them deal with any ongoing medical issues.
- A plan to step up inspections of smoke detectors in the stable area and provide increased penalties when they are intentionally disabled. Commissioner Derek noted that “humans might be able to escape a barn fire but horses usually don’t.”

In addition to these proposals, Executive Director Kirk Breed expanded on the ongoing CHRB safety standard initiative, which includes developing and adopting safety standards for evaluation and control of track surfaces as well as monitoring, analyzing, and making recommendations to improve track surface material and maintenance procedures. These efforts greatly expand the role of the track safety steward at every racetrack. Breed envisions these same safety stewards leading investigations and working with UC Davis to determine the cause of every fatality and injury occurring at a California racetrack.

During the course of the three-hour committee meeting, representatives of the Thoroughbred Owners of California and California Thoroughbred Trainers horsemen’s groups voiced various opinions about some of the proposals, particularly the one to void claims under certain conditions. While endorsing the motivation to protect racehorses, they cited the possibility of unintended consequences that need to be addressed.

While encouraging the horse racing industry to participate in the discussion and development of the various proposals, Commissioner Derek made her position clear with the statement, “I’ve been on this Board for more than two-and-a-half years now and I’m surprised by how content everyone is with the rules regarding the welfare of horses.” She said that instead of finding fault with such proposals, she wished people “would call me and offer ways to make things better for the horse.”

In reference to the claiming rule, Commissioner Harris said afterwards that although the problem might be limited to only a small number of horsemen, “Where there is intent to sell the horse in a claiming race even if there is a significant likelihood that so doing could be catastrophically damaging to the horse, we need to send a strong message that this is not acceptable.”

Commissioner Harris also endorsed the combination CHRB safety standard initiative and UC Davis research proposal by noting, “As field sizes have decreased and the costs of keeping a horse in training have increased, it is critical that we look at ways to do better jobs in keeping horses sound. I think this overall plan can have some major payback for all segments.”

Commissioner Harris also noted that he strongly supported complete transparency of the medical history of horses that undergo necropsies as a result of dying at a licensed racing enclosure. “It came as a shock to me to hear that often times the Board has had difficulty security the appropriate health records,” he said. “These can be provided by going through legal channels but it seems ridiculous that anyone losing a horse would not want the investigation maximized. This is not meant to point fingers at anyone for fault but rather to help us better understand the causation and possible mitigation of injuries.”

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