

30 racetracks to compile data on racehorse injuries

By MATT HEGARTY

LEXINGTON, Ky. - Thirty racetracks in the United States have agreed to report ontrack racehorse injuries using a standardized form developed by a Florida veterinarian beginning Friday, officials involved in the effort said Wednesday.

Dr. Mary Scollay, the association veterinarian at Gulfstream Park and Calder Race Course in Florida, said the goal of using the standard form is to identify "markers" that may indicate common factors between racing injuries by comparing the data across jurisdictions. Many state and association veterinarians already keep data on racing injuries, but the lack of a standard form made a national database difficult to develop, Scollay said.

The form includes information about the conditions of the race, certain past performance information about the injured horse, types of equipment worn, details about the incident that led to the injury, a detailed description of the type of injury, and the method of treatment. The form also asks whether the horse was euthanized as a result of the injury within 72 hours of the incident.

Information gleaned from the database will be distributed to the racetracks that participate in the study, but the publication of site-specific information will be left up to the tracks, Scollay said. She said the participants decided to allow the tracks to determine whether the data will be made public because "this is not about recriminations, this is about improving the situation."

National statistics about injuries that do not identify the racetrack where the injuries occurred will be made available publicly, Scollay said.

In addition to the two largest Florida tracks, participating facilities include all of the tracks in Kentucky, the tracks operated by the New York Racing Association, and the tracks owned by Churchill Downs Inc. Notable for their absences are the major California tracks, with the exception of Hollywood Park. But those tracks are already involved in a reporting study that is being developed by the California Horse Racing Board. Scollay said the study's developers only asked for volunteers, and did not press tracks to comply.

The reporting form does not include any information about what medication an injured horse was administered on raceday. Scollay said records related to the identity of medications that are given on raceday, aside from the anti-bleeding medication Lasix, are not readily available to the veterinarians who will be filling out the reports.

The use of legal raceday medications, like the painkiller Butazolidin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, are thought by many veterinarians to be pertinent to the study of incidences of racetrack injuries. Scollay said obtaining information about the use of painkillers from owners and veterinarians on a specific horse might "in some cases require a subpoena," which would greatly complicate the reporting veterinarian's task.

"It would be possible to request that information after the fact," Scollay said. "But I needed to develop a form that was going to be easy to fill out. If it's going to take more than a minute to fill out, it's not going to get filled out."

The development of the standard form grew out of an industry conference held last October at Keeneland called the Welfare and Safety of the Horse Summit. Since the conference took place, the Jockey Club has been overseeing seven committees that have identified areas of interest to improve racehorse safety. One of the areas being studied is the reporting of veterinary treatments to a horse.

InCompass, a software company owned by the Jockey Club, is in discussions with the form's developers about doing the administrative work to maintain the injury database, according to Dan Fick, executive director of the Jockey Club. In the meantime, Scollay will be entering the data herself, Fick said. Scollay has not been compensated for any of her work on the project.