

CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD EXPLAINS THEIR DRUG TESTING PROCEDURES

The rules of racing are intended to maintain a level playing field; any drug testing program is meant to monitor compliance to those rules. In reality, drug testing is a deterrent.

For truly illicit activity where the intent is to take an unfair advantage (cheat), the current program in California is working well. But we know it isn't perfect. We are always looking for holes in the system and ways to improve the program.

The CHRB began conducting out-of-competition testing as a routine part of their drug regulation program in mid-February. Blood doping agents are the targets of this testing. Specifically, these are epoetin (Epogen®, Procrit®, "EPO") and darbepoetin (Aranesp®). These drugs are synthetic forms of the natural hormone erythropoietin; they all stimulate red blood cell production. These drugs are administered several days in advance of racing and will not be detected in post-race testing. Out-of-competition testing is the only way these drugs can be identified. This is the reason out of competition is critical in human sports testing. Other prohibited peptide hormones will be included in the testing protocol as those tests are brought on line. We will not be testing for routine therapeutic medications, but we will be specifically testing for the synthetic hemoglobin Oxyglobin®.

Horses are selected for out-of-competition testing by both random and non-random methods. Non-random methods will have specific objective criteria to identify a group of horses. For example, last fall horses nominated to the Cal Cup was the selection criteria. Trainers will not be targeted by non-random methods without cause. We have tried to make the program as unobtrusive as possible. This is a new program; we welcome constructive recommendations to make the sampling process easier for everyone. A key element to this program is unpredictability so we will



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not be able to restrict testing to any specific day or days.

The CHRB will be expanding its program of freezing routine, cleared samples for retroactive testing. Retroactive testing will involve testing random samples with new tests or selecting specific samples based on specific information. If an illicit drug is being used for which we did not have a test at the time the sample was analyzed, we now have the ability to go back and re-examine the sample with a new test.

We are also in the process of developing the anabolic steroid testing program. Currently, nandrolone (Durabolin®), boldenone (Equipoise®), stanozolol (Winstrol-V®), and testosterone are Class IV drugs and will be handled as category D penalties (warnings) under the new penalty guidelines. All other anabolic steroids are at least Class III violations. We will be asking trainers and veterinarians to assist us in developing withdrawal time information to avoid future problems. Within the next 12 months, anabolic steroids are expected to be regulated in most states. Congressman Whitfield of Kentucky has introduced federal legislation requiring a total prohibition as opposed to the proposed regulation state by state.

A new website should be of use to trainers and veterinarians. The RMTTC is hosting a site for withdrawal time information around the country for cooperative jurisdictions. The site is www.rmtcnet.com; go to the Withdrawal Times box and follow the instructions. These are the best available estimates at this time for California and many other states. Not all drug withdrawal times are available, but additional information will be added in the future as it becomes available.

HORSEMEN NEED TO BE AWARE SEVERAL DRUGS REMAIN PROBLEMATIC:

Fluephenazine is a long-acting tranquilizer. Two separate fluphenazine (Prolixin®) positives are working through the process where the administration periods were purported to be 14 days and 16 days prior to racing. These administration dates are supported by the veterinarians' confidential reports. Unfortunately, fluephenazine has been shown to be pharmacologically active for over a month and is a Class II violation, a serious offense. This should raise concern for any trainer or veterinarian when fluephenazine is being administered anywhere close to a race. A 30-day withdrawal time is recommended as a minimum until more research information becomes available. Be aware this drug is confirmed in the blood rather than urine because of its unique elimination characteristics.

Hydroxyzine is a very useful medication for chronic allergies, including urticaria (hives) and respiratory allergies. Hydroxyzine metabolizes to cetirizine, which is also a pharmacologically active drug. Hydroxyzine is administered orally and the last two positives have been in powdered formulations prepared by a veterinary compounding pharmacy. As with all oral medications administered by barn personnel, mistakes are easy to make. A single oral dose of 250mg clears in 96 hours, but we have seen 8 times this dose on some prescriptions. The trainers have claimed they stopped the medication at 5 days in two of the cases. A seven-day withdrawal time may not be adequate at high doses or when using compounded preparations.

Methocarbamol continues to be a problem. We had suspected these violations were coming from compounded injectable methocarbamol with inconsistently formulated strengths. That may be a factor, but the most common finding is oral administration along with a methocarbamol injection at 48 hours. Again, oral administration increases the chance

for management error and can be expected to extend the detectability of the drug in post-race samples.

TCO2 is still occasionally a problem, but we believe some violations may be inadvertent. We advise trainers to minimize and closely monitor their pre-race medication schemes, keep your horse well hydrated, and never administer an imbalanced or excessive electrolyte load. A significant number of horses have been administered one or another paste formulation of vitamins and/or electrolytes within 24 hours of the race. Many of these paste vitamin/electrolyte preparations contain bicarbonate or other alkalinizing agents. Some certainly have high electrolyte concentrations. Be aware that these products are not permitted on race day. Oddly, there is a glaring disparity between northern and southern California. There has been about twice the rate of violations in northern California as in southern California, which was not the case prior to last summer. We do know the pre-race medication protocols are different between the north and south. Regardless, the pre-race testing TCO2 program has worked well to deter the race day use of alkalinizing agents. We have had only one trainer exceed 39 mmls/l since the CHRBB took over the program and he received a 15-day suspension for the violations. The warnings letters for over 36mmls/l has also worked well. Prior to this program, the rate of samples 36.0mmls/l or higher was 1.4%; the rate is now at 0.2%.

Methamphetamine is a great concern to every regulator and should be to every trainer. This is our most common Class I violation. These are most likely from human derived contamination by someone in the barn having a "meth" drug abuse problem. This is a surprisingly common and cheap drug. We do not believe there has been intent to drug any of the horses, but amphetamines cannot be tolerated in horse racing for obvious reasons. The lightest penalty for the trainer to date has

been a 120-day suspension.

There are several developments of importance to trainers in the enforcement and hearing process. The CHRBB has been willing to settle cases administratively if a trainer so desires. Any settlement has to be mutually acceptable to both parties. Whether to settle a complaint or go to hearing is entirely up to the licensee. All settlement agreements must be approved by the Board of Stewards or the Board. As CHRBB policy, all settlements are publicly announced. The other change we are seeking is in the hearing process where Class I, II, & III violations would be heard first in front of a hearing officer or the Board of Stewards rather than the Office of Administrative Hearings. This requires legislative changes currently under consideration in Sacramento. Lastly, the new penalty guidelines will soon be finalized. The penalties are significant for Class I, II, & III violations, but the hearing officer or Board of Stewards must take into account mitigating factors from the licensee and aggravating from the state. The intention is to allow a fairer process for the trainer or any other licensee charged in the complaint.

Lastly, under the new penalty guidelines with NSAID violations (phenylbutazone, flunixin, ketoprofen), the trainer can elect to deal directly to the Official Veterinarian with a set penalty schedule or to go to the Board of Stewards for a formal hearing. All penalties in this category call for higher fines than have typically been issued under the current process. Fines are significantly higher for multiple violations and especially high levels of the NSAID's.

The CHRBB's hope is that the programs we have established will protect the integrity of our racing, be fair to all horsemen, and reduce violations over time. The goal is for California to have the cleanest, fairest racing in the United States. ■

