

Addressing Horse Fatalities at Santa Anita Park

Since December 26 of last year there have been 23 fatalities of thoroughbred horses at the Santa Anita Park. The circumstances surrounding this significant increase remain nebulous. Many connected with Santa Anita Park believe that the winter rains are a contributing factor causing the soil to become too soft. Others with the Stronach Group, which owns Santa Anita Park, argue that standards for veterinary treatment need to be updated.

In an effort to minimize these cases, the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) conducted an evaluation in February in regards to track conditions, ultimately concluding through soil samples that the track was “100 percent ready,” according to Dr. Mick Peterson, Director of the University of Kentucky's Agricultural Equine Programs. Despite this analysis, the number of injuries and fatalities continues to grow.

With the several deaths that followed the analysis, the CHRB then approved an initiative to eliminate the use of race-day medications. According to the Los Angeles Times, “The United States and Canada are the only countries that allow race-day medication.” While this practice cannot be directly tied to having caused the recent fatalities at Santa Anita, the CHRB is interested in exploring all alternatives to fully protect the horses moving forward.

MOTION

SOLIS _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

KUEHL _____

BARGER _____

HAHN _____

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR KATHRYN BARGER

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These fatalities have become a rallying point for animal rights activists across the state. In a public statement, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have requested Governor Gavin Newsom to “urgently form an independent panel to investigate the training and veterinary practices in California racing, including the use of bisphosphonates and other medications that reportedly have been used indiscriminately.” If the State cannot assure that they are doing everything possible to ensure animal safety, PETA and others are ready to push for an end to horse racing in California.

Despite the most recent fatality, Santa Anita Park will remain open to host the Santa Anita Derby, a significant race for those hoping to make it to the Kentucky Derby on May 2, 2019.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer to work with the Department of Animal Care and Control to draft and send a five-signature letter to the California Horse Racing Board advocating for a thorough analysis of horse fatalities at Santa Anita Park, including updated standards, if appropriate.

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SUP:KB: ead