

HAIR'S THE NEWS! NEW MEXICO RACING COMMISSION TO PENALIZE HORSES FOR POSITIVE HAIR SAMPLE RESULTS

After waiting several months in anticipation for the opportunity to do drug analysis on horse hair, the New Mexico Racing Commission (NMRC) was quick to put their new rule into use. The first hair testing excursion by state investigator Leasa Johnson and contract veterinarian Alan Chastain took place on July 11, 2017. The new rule, which went into effect on July 1, 2017, allows the NMRC to place a horse on the stewards list for 60 days if it is found to be positive for certain prohibited substances. The rule does not allow for a trainer to be sanctioned with a fine or suspension. That is based on the difficulty of determining when a drug was administered when tested in hair. The rule nonetheless has already proven to be effective. Of the first six horses that had hair tested, four of the hair samples proved positive for the drug clenbuterol. Two of the horses were from 2016 AQHA Champion trainer Judd Kearn's barn. The other two were from trainer Sal Soto's and Jose Barron's barn.

Hair sample testing was a tool deemed necessary by industry stakeholders in New Mexico in order to level the playing field. In 2016, New Mexico had 169 drug violations, a majority of them from quarter horses and a significant number of them from West Texas trainers. Executive Director of the New Mexico Racing Commission, Ismael "Izzy" Trejo said, "Over the past several months, we have seen a number of positives from stables based in Texas, where it is legal to use clenbuterol. We felt that due to the volume of participation in New Mexico from Texas stables, it was unfair for our New Mexico horsemen to compete against horses from Texas that might have been abusing clenbuterol for the anabolic steroid effects, or other prohibited substances."

New Mexico has one of the most intensive out of competition testing programs in the United States with almost 600 samples taken last year. New Mexico horsemen live under the reality that their horses may be selected for out of competition testing anytime of the year whereas Texas based horses can utilize clenbuterol in Texas before coming to compete in New Mexico for the rich futurity and derby money offered in the Land of Enchantment.

Two of New Mexico's signature horse racing events, the upcoming All-American Futurity and Derby, which by tradition, will take place over the Labor Day weekend of September 2-4, will offer approximately \$4.5 million in purse money between the two races. In order to assure

race fans and horsemen that New Mexico is doing their best to create an environment of integrity and to protect the well-being of the horse, a decision was made this past week that the NMRC will be testing a number of hair samples from horses that are nominated to the All-American Derby and Futurity. Not only will the NMRC do that, they will also pull hair samples from all the qualifiers for the finals of the Futurity and Derby. NMRC Chairman Ray Willis stated, "The owners and trainers that have put their time and money into supporting one of the largest sporting events in New Mexico deserve to have a fair shake at the lucrative purse money offered and we feel this is one of the tactics we can use to obtain that."

The NMRC will continue to use hair testing as one of their tools to achieve a level playing field not only for the All-American but other big races on the New Mexico stakes calendar such as "The Down at Albuquerque Fall Quarter Horse Championship" on September 24, 2017, carrying a purse of \$250,000. The "Fall Championship" is being run in conjunction with the "Champion of Champions at Los Alamos" as a "win and you're in" event.