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Safety of Synthetic Racing Surfaces to be Studied

LEXINGTON, Ky. – A study is being planned to examine the consistency of synthetic racing surfaces as temperatures change, a thoroughbred welfare and safety group announced today.

While the synthetic surfaces have reduced the number of catastrophic injuries for horses at those tracks, some have had problems with track being inconsistent.

The study is an outgrowth of last year's Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit a year ago, which was sponsored by the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation and The Jockey Club.

The study would look at the temperature sensitivity of synthetic surfaces – in a controlled laboratory environment -- as temperatures change, said Mick Peterson, a University of Maine engineering professor who studies track surfaces.

“I think certainly from discussion with trainers, this is something that I think a lot of people want to see,” said Peterson, who is working on the racing surfaces committee that formed from the summit.

At Turfway Park, trainers complained last winter that the Florence, Ky., track would ball up in horses hooves – a problem management believes occurred as temperatures neared freezing and water could not be added to the surface.

This summer at Del Mar near San Diego, trainers complained that the Polytrack was different from the time of early morning workouts to when races were conducted in the afternoon.