

## Test Available to Screen Racehorses for Alcohol

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**NATIONAL REPORT** — State racing commissions now have the ability to screen for what once was only a whispered-about technique — using vodka injections to calm racehorses.

Until recently, the industry didn't have the technology to test generally for the presence of alcohol, which can be barely visible in a horse's blood and urine because of its size.

"But now, machinery has gotten better and better. It'll take a little while, because not every laboratory has this top-of-the-line equipment; but that day is coming," says Dr. Scot Waterman, director of the Racing Medications and Testing Consortium in Lexington, Ky.

Rumored to calm a jittery horse before race time, vodka injections have never been studied in a controlled environment to determine what impact they actually have on a horse, Waterman says. Administered through IV within four hours before a race, a dose typically measures about one-fourth of a cup.

The development of an available, substance-specific test is usually all it takes to stop the practice.

"It is sort of a cat-and-mouse game. Usually once a positive test has been called, people stop using that substance," Waterman says.

In Nebraska, all horses placing first, second or third, and any other horses recommended by track stewards, are tested for the presence of illegal drugs, says Nebraska State Racing Commission Chairman Dennis Lee.

Blood and urine samples are analyzed at Industrial Labs in Denver, Colo., yet rarely reveal illegal drug use. "Exotic drugs, unusual drugs, things given with the pure intention to cheat, fortunately, are found in a very small percentage," says Waterman.

Cost remains a factor in implementing the new alcohol test, Lee says, but he is more concerned about the potential damage caused to the horse-racing industry. "It never is a positive thing when you've had extensive news coverage about this type of event allegedly occurring. There will always be those people that see racing as something less than on the up-and-up," he says. "But we as an industry are hopefully doing a better job than 15 and 20 years ago in communicating to the public and helping to dispel any negatives."