

Posted: Wednesday, February 21, 2007 5:41 PM

Committee supports California rule on toe grabs

A special committee formed following the Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit last fall is calling for a ban on toe grabs with a height greater than 4 millimeters on the front horseshoes of Thoroughbred racehorses.

Formed in January, the committee focuses on shoeing and hoof care, and mainly on the recommendation to ban certain horseshoes that research, supported by Susan Stover, D.V.M., PhD, of the University of California at Davis, has shown to be detrimental to the soundness and safety of racehorses. The research has demonstrated that high toe grabs on front shoes make a Thoroughbred 16 times more likely to suffer a catastrophic injury while racing.

The committee is focusing on the use of "regular" and "high" toe grabs that have a 6.4- and 9.5-millimeter toe grab, respectively.

Chaired by Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association President Bill Casner, members of the committee include trainers Richard Mandella and Todd Pletcher; farriers Steve Norman and Mitch Taylor; veterinarians Rob Gillette, D.V.M., Bob Hunt, D.V.M., and Stover; mechanical engineer and track surface researcher Dr. Mick Peterson; California racing commissioner John Harris; and Racing Hall of Fame jockey Chris McCarron.

The committee is also calling for tracks to ban the use of all toe grabs on front horseshoes on synthetic track surfaces, such as Polytrack, Cushion Track, and Tapeta. The use of toe grabs, turndowns, caulks, and toe grabs on hind horseshoes also is under consideration by the committee pending the review of existing research.

The California Horse Racing Board prohibited toe grabs in February 2006 and will discuss enforcement on Thursday at the CHRB meeting.

"We have solid research on this issue and now it's time to do something about it," said Harris, CHRB vice chairman. "I think that will happen this week [at our February 22 CHRB meeting]. That should pay some good dividends for horse welfare. I urge the rest of the country to follow our lead."

The rule states: "Toe grabs with a height greater than 4 millimeters worn on the front shoes of Thoroughbred horses while racing are prohibited."

The rule will be proposed for adoption nationwide at the Association of Racing Commissioners International Model Rules Committee meeting in April.