GREYHOUND RACES

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Statewide each year, dog owners split about $32 million in purses.

However, the Florida Division of pari-Mutuel Wagering — the agency that regulates the tracks — said it doesn’t address the issue of greyhound testing. It also doesn’t try to determine how dogs such as a Gambino are housed or treated. The tracks say they’re not equipped to do that.

They believe the testing system is flawed. “We have a high level of accountability,” said Dennis Miller, the state regulator who oversees tracks in South Florida. “The test results are not accurate because of testing methods.”

When shown the figures, state officials such as head of greyhound 

Greyhound Carvon Schulte, a Broward County 

The system is flawed and should be improved, she said.

Under the system, every greyhound that finishes first is tested for drugs immediately after the race. Sometimes, a second-place finisher is tested. Always tested at random is a dog that finished out of the money. The urine samples are shipped to a laboratory at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Results can take two to three weeks.

Wasserman Schultz is concerned that the state could come up with a way to test dogs before each race and have results available immediately so suspect dogs could be scratched from the track. She said she’s weighing seeking testimony from state officials as to why this can’t be done.

However, Cynthia Kollard-Baker, director of the UF laboratory, cautioned that rapid-screening tests can yield false positives. Although screening at the track would be ideal, she said, it also would be cost-prohibitive.

Fans of the sport, such as Tom Bigelow, a retired New York police officer who travels throughout Florida to watch greyhound races, say the state should correct testing methods. Bigelow said he finds it unfair that dogs are never alerted that racing winners changed because of positive drug tests.

“Every time there’s a winner, a greyhound never knows it,” Bigelow said. “I hope they don’t.”

Smith, who refers to greyhounds as “neglected,” said he believes the greyhound industry has a responsibility to protect the dogs.

“Greyhounds are trained to run at breakneck speeds. It’s a hard life,” Smith said. “We need to protect these dogs from abuse.”

The Lee County Sheriff’s Office, which covers the Naples-For Sale dog track, was never contacted by Petrello’s spokeswoman. Neither did the Smiths receive any information from the Greyhound Association of Florida, which is the only organization that regulates greyhound racing in Florida.

“Is it disturbing? Yes,” Smith said. “But we need to protect the dogs.”

He added that he would like to see the tracks use a different testing method, such as a saliva test, which is considered more accurate.

“Saliva tests are more reliable,” Smith said. “They can detect drugs in dogs more quickly and accurately.”

The state did not investigate how cocaine got into Petrello’s greyhounds. The Florida Division of pari-Mutuel Wagering is now investigating.

Reporter Alan Souza can be reached at (813) 255-7658.