

## W.Va. Racing Commission considers animal cruelty policy, plans to seek public input

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

First Posted: July 24, 2013 - 11:15 am

Last Updated: July 24, 2013 - 11:21 am

CHARLESTON, West Virginia — The West Virginia Racing Commission plans to seek public input on a proposed animal cruelty policy that clarifies its authority to punish racing permit holders if there is proven abuse.

Commission members discussed the policy Tuesday and planned to approve it. But they decided to delay a decision and post the policy on the commission's website for public comment, the Charleston Daily Mail (<http://bit.ly/140INom>) reported Wednesday.

"This policy kind of clarifies how important and just how committed we are as a commission to addressing cruelty," said Jon Amores, the commission's executive secretary.

The commission oversees horse and greyhound racing in West Virginia.

According to the policy, the commission would investigate all reported acts of animal cruelty, mistreatment, neglect, abandonment or abuse.

Administrative punishments would include fines and revocation of racing permits. A veterinarian would be consulted to determine whether cases should be referred to authorities for possible criminal prosecution.

"I would say that even though we are an administrative agency, any time we believe criminal conduct has occurred, we would be within our purview to refer that conduct to the attention of a prosecuting

attorney -- and animal cruelty is obviously something we feel very strongly about," Commissioner Gregory McDermott said after Tuesday's meeting.

Recently, the commission revoked the permits of two men and suspended the permit of another man who were involved in racing at Wheeling Island Racetrack. Two men were accused of not providing proper care for an injured greyhound, while the other was accused of hitting and jerking dogs.

On Tuesday, the commission decided not to refer the cases to the Ohio County prosecutor, saying they needed more information.

GREY2KUSA President Christine Dorchak, whose group opposes greyhound racing, told the commission that she was disappointed by the decision but thankful that the cases were discussed.

"This is an important step in the right direction for the commission, and we do applaud the commission for working its way toward better protecting greyhounds at West Virginia racetracks," she said.

Sam Burdette, president of the West Virginia Greyhound Owners and Breeders Association, told the commission that he had concerns with referring any case to the prosecutor before the commission holds a hearing.

---

West Virginia Racing Commission: <http://www.racing.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

---

Information from: Charleston Daily Mail, <http://www.dailymail.com>