

# Racing insiders call greyhound track safety into question

By MICHAEL A. SMITH | Posted: Sunday, November 10, 2013 12:15 am

LA MARQUE — An advocacy group has asked the Texas Racing Commission to investigate the track surface at Gulf Greyhound Park after a series of complaints appeared on an Internet forum used by dog breeders, owners and trainers.

The forum comments were significant because they came from industry insiders but echoed some concerns of groups opposed to greyhound racing, said Carey Theil, executive director of Grey2K USA, a Massachusetts-based group billing itself as the country's largest greyhound protection organization.

The comments also hark back to 2011, when a state commission set up a special committee to monitor track conditions at the park after a spike in injuries.

Several online posters on the American Greyhounds forum complained that dogs were being injured at the race park, 1000 FM 1764, in La Marque because the track surface is in poor condition and that park officials were not working to correct the problem.

Gulf Greyhound Park General Manager Sally Briggs, who was on vacation out of state, could not be reached for comment. Her assistant didn't respond to a telephone message seeking comment.

"I had another pup break down again at Gulf," a poster using the screen name defconred10 wrote. "The track conditions are terrible there.

"If they cannot secure a safe racing surface for the Greyhounds, they need to shut down."

The Daily News confirmed the identity of defconred10 as a greyhound breeder. He confirmed the posts were authentic and said they reflected "common knowledge" about the state of the track and widespread frustration among breeders and dog owners.

The man declined to be named in an article because Grey2K USA, which is working to end greyhound racing, also was being named.

Another dog owner confirmed the authenticity of the posts and described the same general situation, but also declined to speak on the record for the same reason.

It was unclear Friday whether the forum comments reflected a widely held opinion or were isolated to the handful of people posting.

The racing commission was not aware of any widespread concern about safety of the track at Gulf

Greyhound Park, spokesman Robert Elrod said Friday.

Elrod said the only complaint Gulf Greyhound Park received about the track's surface came recently from one of the parties involved in the forum thread.

The commission would follow up on the complaint and the request for an investigation lodged by Grey2K USA, he said.

"We are currently looking into the situation further," Elrod said. "We have already spoken to (commission) staff on-site and also will be interviewing kennel owners at GGP in the very near future to see if they share any of the concerns raised in the Grey2K letter."

The Texas Greyhound Association, which represents owners, breeders and other greyhound racing participants, said it also was unaware of any widespread discontent among industry insiders about the quality of the track or the park's commitment to resolving problems.

Association Executive Director Nick James said the organization had heard complaints about the track being "slow" but none about it posing a risk to the dogs.

He said it was not true that the park had been unwilling to work with the association to solve problems.

"That's just BS," James said. "I don't know how to say it any more plainly."

The relationship had been less agreeable in the past but had been good for about the past 18 months, James said.

"They've implemented almost every improvement we've suggested. If we point out something that needs to be fixed, and it is broken, they fix it."

The forum comments agree with information Grey2K USA has been receiving from its own sources for about four years, Theil said.

"We've heard this informally for a long time," he said. "It seems that everyone is acknowledging there are problems with this track, except maybe for the track itself."

The condition of the track was an issue in 2011 when, after a spike in injuries, the racing commission formed a committee to monitor track surface conditions at Gulf Greyhound Park. A breeder who testified before the racing commission at the time said poor track conditions had, at least in part, inspired two kennels to leave Gulf Greyhound Park.

Racing commission staff members walk and visually inspect the track on all racing days before the first race, Elrod said.

"Any problems would be reported to the track's racing secretary," Elrod said. "No problems have been reported by staff recently."

In March, Grey2K USA and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals published a report based on racing commission documents stating that between January 2008 and December 2011, dogs suffered 1,507 injuries at Gulf Greyhound Park. The most common injury was broken legs at 19 percent, followed by other fractures at 12 percent, torn muscles and ligaments at 15 percent and pulled muscles at 15 percent.

During the same period, 56 dogs either died from or were put down because of injury, according to the report.