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Greyhounds: Humane concern

Grey2K USA released a report this month that questions the treatment of greyhounds raced for betting at "racinos" in Wheeling and Cross Lanes.

The group, based in Massachusetts, advocates ending greyhound racing, and has produced reports on conditions for dogs in other states.

While Grey2K condemns obvious abuse -- trainers striking animals, for example -- most of the 48-page report highlights what is wrong in "acceptable" treatment of animals bred and raised to run for spectators.

For example, greyhounds stand about 30 inches at the shoulder, yet they are routinely kept in cages that are not much higher, where they cannot fully raise their heads.

Good kennels let dogs out for at least 15 minutes at a time, several times a day, but dogs still spend 22 out of 24 hours in a cage. For large dogs, bred to run, this is cruel, says Christine Dorchak, president and general counsel for Grey2K, who visited Charleston and Wheeling to share the report.

And some owners feed their dogs diseased meat, the cheapest feed available.

Injuries are another problem. In the press of competition, particularly when rounding a turn, the long, slender limbs of a Greyhound are prone to snap as dogs collide, fall or trample. Many injuries may be career-ending but are not necessarily life-ending, unless owners conclude that it is cheaper to euthanize animals rather than provide medical treatment.

West Virginia allowed tracks in Wheeling and Cross Lanes to add table games on a condition that those tracks would run a certain number of live dog races. The state puts in almost \$30 million a year in prize money and funding for breeders.

But dog racing is on the decline. Without the state mandate and infusions of cash, the tracks probably would not continue them. Is this really the best investment of public money? West Virginia has multitudes of other industries that don't get state subsidies. Why should the dog biz be special?

Grey2K says that greyhound racing, which started in the 1930s and didn't come to West Virginia until 1975, is on its way out. Until then, West Virginia has a racing commission that should examine this report carefully to protect the quality of life of these lovely animals.