

# Regulators investigate death of dog from kennel facing drug inquiry at Iowa greyhound track



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IOWA CITY, Iowa — Scientists will study whether the death of a racing dog at an Iowa greyhound track has any link to the use of a risky performance-enhancing drug found in other animals from the same kennel, a regulator said Thursday.

The dog from the Iowa Greyhound Park in Dubuque died at a veterinarian's office Wednesday night. Regulators obtained custody of the carcass and sent it to a pathology laboratory at Iowa State University for a necropsy, Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission administrator Brian Ohorilko said.

"Because of the information we have, we think we need to pursue all paths," he said.

The commission is looking into dogs that have tested positive for the banned substance ractopamine. Ohorilko said two or three dogs from two kennels have tested positive for the drug, which is widely used in the U.S. as a feed supplement to help pigs, cattle and turkeys increase muscle mass. Other samples came back as suspicious and additional testing is underway at Iowa State, he said.

The commission has temporarily suspended two trainers and barred dogs from two kennels from racing, pending the outcome of the investigation.

Jerry Crawford, an attorney for the Iowa Greyhound Association, which operates the track, said all "evidence points to no wrongdoing" by any kennel employee. He said he believes the dogs ate the drug when it came in their food, unbeknownst to the employees. He said kennel employees have passed polygraph exams conducted by retired law enforcement officials in which they attested that they never gave the dogs ractopamine.

As for the death, Crawford said he suspects it is from a lung infection but "has no idea" whether it could be linked to the drug.

Carey Theil, executive director of Grey2KUSA, a nonprofit that opposes greyhound racing, said he believed it would be an "incredible coincidence" if the death wasn't linked to the drug. Racing dogs are typically two or three years old and in peak condition, he noted.

Ohorilko said the source of the drug hasn't been confirmed, and that samples of meat the dogs were fed are being tested. He said regulators haven't seen the substance in Iowa racing before.

The suspended trainers are Jessica Hughes, who works at a kennel owned by Jon Stidham; and Alicia Bushey, the trainer at Robert Hardison's kennel. Both kennels cannot currently enter their roughly 70 dogs in races.

An administrative panel will consider the kennels' license suspensions Monday. Hearings that had been scheduled Thursday were postponed after trainers requested time to conduct independent testing of the feed, Ohorilko said.

Ractopamine is banned in animal racing because it can be used to mimic the effects of steroids — reducing body fat while enhancing muscle growth. One scientific study has linked the drug to "arterial, cardiac, and skeletal muscle damage" in greyhounds.

Crawford said he doubted the drug would enhance performance of greyhounds, saying dogs in that study became sick and lethargic.

The investigation is nonetheless a setback for the Iowa Greyhound Association, which started operating the track earlier this year under a deal approved by lawmakers to phase out greyhound racing. Citing the suspension of two of its 10 kennels, the track announced this week that it would cut the number of races per card from 15 to 12 until its season ends Oct. 24.

The Council Bluffs track will close in December, but a compromise allowed the greyhound association to take over the Dubuque track from Mystique Casino. Casinos were required to pay \$72 million, half of which will go to operate the Dubuque track. The rest will be paid to breeders and others who worked in the industry.