

## Greyhound deaths spur push for records

By [Billy Cox](#)

Published: Saturday, April 27, 2013 at 5:19 p.m.

Two recent canine fatalities at the Sarasota Kennel Club have prompted an out-of-state animal-rights group to press the track for open records.

At the request of Massachusetts-based GREY2K USA, investigators with the Florida Division of Pari-Mutuel Waging confirmed the death of a 2-year-old greyhound, which was apparently electrocuted when it stumbled into the electrical lure-track railing just seconds into a race on Feb. 9.

Investigators also discovered that during a Jan. 17 matinee performance, a second dog collapsed and could not be revived. "Cause of death was listed as unknown; consider electrocution, cardiac arrest, brain hemorrhage, aneurysm, etc.," the agency reported.

Documents obtained by GREY2K USA also provided details into another state investigation of Sarasota Kennel Club three years ago.

During separate races on March 20, 2010, multiple greyhound collisions resulted in seven dogs with fractured or broken legs. Three of those greyhounds were euthanized.

In a subsequent response to the Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering three years ago, SKC racing director Thomas Bowersox wrote, "Although 1 of these injuries is to (sic) many, when you consider we have been racing 19 Weeks, 116 races per week which accounts for 17,632 greyhounds that raced on this surface.

"According to Dr. Wyatt, the track veterinarian, a total of 14 euthanized greyhounds have occurred due to track accidents," Bowersox wrote, referring to the 2009-10 season. "As you can see this is a very small percent of the number of greyhounds that have raced here this season."

No additional action was taken because the state concluded no rules had been broken.

But in Somerville, Mass., GREY2K USA executive director Carey Theil said an accurate accounting of injuries and deaths — in Sarasota and at a dozen other Sunshine State greyhound tracks — is elusive because "Florida only responds to complaints that are raised," Theil said. "In the Sarasota case, we had a confidential informant who brought it to our attention."

In Tallahassee, a spokeswoman for the Department of Business and Professional Regulation said its Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering conducts hundreds of "unannounced random inspections of kennels and barns each year at pari-mutuel facilities" on a regular basis, "even in the absence of a specific complaint."

In an email, DBPR spokeswoman Sandi Copes Poreda said, "The Division will



HERALD-TRIBUNE ARCHIVE / 2009

Greyhounds go airborne as they make their way down the raceway at the Sarasota Kennel Club. A dog died at the track in February after apparently stumbling into the electrical lure-track railing.

investigate any knowledge of a suspicious death of a racing animal. Additionally, the Division will investigate any knowledge of an injury where abuse or neglect of a racing animal may be suspected.”

### **'Like Russian roulette'**

Poreda said the state wants more expedient reporting from the greyhound tracks.

It is proposing a new rule that “would require trainers to notify the Division within 18 hours of the death of any racing greyhound at a licensed racing track or kennel compound. We expect to file the rule for final adoption in early May.”

Bowersox said SKC’s injury reports are open to public inspection.

“We don’t announce injuries or deaths — you can understand that,” Bowersox said. “We do have accidents, just like horse racing and auto racing. But we’re not trying to hide anything.

“I would prefer not to send (injury reports) to (Theil), but he’s welcome to come down and take a look.”

Bowersox said SKC’s track is “designed to eliminate” accidental electrocution, and that since no autopsies were performed on the dogs, “there’s no way to say for sure whether it was electrocution or something else. Dogs are euthanized for reasons other than accidents.”

In an injury report obtained by the state, track veterinarian Dr. David Wyatt wrote of the Feb. 9 incident, “Dog fell or was pushed within 20 yards of leaving box. Fell under rail. Death by electrocution, burns on jacket.” Wyatt referred the Herald-Tribune’s query back to Sarasota Kennel Club.

Theil said his group requests state records on greyhound racing each month.

“I do not recall a single investigative file instigated by a routine inspection,” he said. “Whenever a dog is euthanized at the track, the state always said no rules were violated, case closed.”

Theil also said the 17,632 greyhounds alluded to in Bowersox’s letter refers to “individual racing starts, not the actual number of dogs.”

Theil said the average track races 500 to 1,000 greyhounds each season.

“He’s right about the numbers of dead and injured greyhounds being relatively low, but the risk is accumulated,” he said. “It’s like a game of Russian roulette, where you’ve got a 1-in-6 chance of shooting yourself the first time around. But if you have enough starts, at some point you will be injured.”

Bowersox said the 14 fatalities recorded during the 2009-10 season was above average.

“These things, unfortunately, run in streaks,” he said, adding that GREY2K USA is publicizing the deaths to promote a clear agenda:

“They’re always doing anything they can to create or stir up a problem and make greyhound racing look bad. And it’s not just greyhounds — they go after everything, like elephants in the circus.”

Sarasota Kennel Club’s current racing season will conclude on May 4.