

# Florida Greyhound Deaths: 131 Dogs Killed Last Year at State Tracks

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The dog was electrocuted before it even had a name. In October of last year, the anonymous animal "fell into a rail" and died at a Flagler compound training track, newly released records from the Department of Parimutuel Wagering show.

"Some of the cases are just heartbreaking," says Carey

Thiel, president of the nonprofit Grey2K and an activist who wants to see greyhound racing banned. "The case of the nameless dog is the one that always gets me."

Thiel just wants to see things the way they used to be. In the 1920s, the sport was forbidden in Florida. But the ban on gambling worked about as well as Prohibition. The state's first three tracks - Miami, Tampa, and St. Pete - all flourished under the radar for about a decade.

Although gambling was still frowned upon in 1931, legislators made an exception that year for gaming centers in which bettors played against one another, thereby setting their own odds. These so-called pari-mutuel operations include racetracks. Today there are 12 places in Florida where you can put money on dogs.

Since then, animal activists like Thiel have been fighting to end the sport, saying it's archaic and abusive. They often cite that it's illegal in 39 states.

But until recently, they've had no hard data from within Florida to back up their case. It was only last year that tracks here were required by law to record deaths on their properties. Now we know that 131 died in the last year, which equates to about one dog every three days. We also have an idea of how they're dying.

At Palm Beach Kennel Club, Mardi Gras Casino, and Flagler Dog Track, the three racing operations in South Florida, dogs were euthanized after curable injuries, these records show. On April 21 of this year, a 2-year-old named Kelso's Caper fractured her left front leg during an evening race. The vet was closed, so the dog suffered through the night before being euthanized the next day, the log notes. Others have been put to sleep because they've had broken vertebral columns or hocks and, in one case, seizures.

The data also reveal which tracks are the least safe for dogs. South Florida's are the three safest on the list. In 2013, only 15 dogs died here. Compare that combined total with the 22 that died at St. Pete's Derby Lane.

But Grey2K president Thiel explains that South Florida's tracks are some of the most competitive. He says that the numbers are low only because greyhounds start their careers here and that it's much more likely they'll electrocute themselves or get trampled later on at a track like Sarasota Kennel Club.

Now that death reporting is the law, Grey2K is working to make it a requirement for tracks to keep a log of whenever dogs get hurt. Eleanor Sobel, a state senator representing Hollywood, authored an injury-reporting bill that passed unanimously in the Senate last session but was never brought up in the House. Theil says that this requirement could be the industry's death blow and that Sobel will be pushing for it again next year.

"What we have found is that the more transparent the industry has to be, the better the outcomes for the dogs," he says. "When we've passed these sorts of reporting laws in other states, we've seen the number of dogs killed go down. I personally believe it's because the more the public knows, it becomes harder for tracks to kill dogs with fixable broken legs."

Here's the List of Greyhound Tracks in Florida, from most to least deadly, with the number of deaths in parentheses:

1. Derby Lane (22)
2. Daytona Beach Kennel Club (19)
3. Sarasota Kennel Club (16)
4. Sanford Orlando Kennel Club (13)
5. Orange Park Kennel Club (12)
6. Ebro (11)
7. Pensacola Greyhound Track (8)
8. Florida Kennels Inc./Palm Beach Kennel Club (7)

9. Flagler (6)

10. Naples-Ft. Myers/Mardi Gras/Melbourne (2)

Note: Some dogs that died at animal hospitals were also included in the log, but only tracks were listed.