

## 2 dogs die, 97 sickened at Daytona Beach greyhound track

By [Jeffrey Cassady](#)

[jeffrey.cassady@news-jrn.com](mailto:jeffrey.cassady@news-jrn.com)

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DAYTONA BEACH — Two greyhounds died and 97 others fell ill at the Daytona Beach Kennel Club & Poker Room this spring in what state officials suspect was a case of food poisoning, according to recently released documents.

On April 6, kennel staffers found a greyhound, Cherokee Rock, dead at the bottom of its crate, lying in a large pool of blood, state records show.

A second greyhound, Long Shadow, was found in a pool of blood as well, but the dog was still alive, records indicate. Long Shadow was sent to the track's veterinarian who tried to treat the dog. However, treatment was unsuccessful, and the dog was euthanized, according to the records.

State reports show that 97 other dogs in the same kennel exhibited either vomiting or diarrhea or both.

The dogs began showing symptoms after they were fed a mixture of raw beef — First Choice 100% Ground Beef and Lucky Dog 100% Frozen Beef — and dry dog food, according to records.

State officials have puzzled over what caused the illness, with some in the Florida Department of Agriculture suspecting food poisoning. They're also not sure if the problem was with the food itself or its handling.

The Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation Division of Pari-Mutuel Wagering, which regulates commercial greyhound racing, is still looking into the issue.

The incident occurred just weeks after a News-Journal report showed that the kennel club led the state in greyhound deaths with 15 from May 2013 to February of this year.

Roughly 900 greyhounds are based at the kennel club, said Todd Byers, a kennel operator and president of the Daytona Beach Greyhound Association.

The club consists of nine kennels, all of which are independently operated.

The state takes the lead in investigating deaths and illnesses.

"We don't get involved in the investigation," said Dan Francati, the Daytona Beach Kennel Club & Poker Room's general manager.



*News-Journal file/JIM TILLER*

Greyhounds race at the Daytona Beach Kennel Club & Poker Room in Daytona Beach.

“Typically, these things are turned over to the state, and they investigate because they have testing labs for the food.”

A necropsy performed on the euthanized dog failed to indicate a specific cause of death.

Both dogs that died were found in a pool of blood from their rectums.

The agriculture department received four samples of the meat-and-kibble mixture for testing, but was unable to analyze them.

“We did obtain samples of the feed but were unable to proceed with testing due to the timing and condition of the samples received, which were not suitable for testing purposes,” said Erin Gillespie, press secretary for the department of agriculture. “We were not able to make any final determinations on the feed because of the time elapse and chain of custody, as well as the lack of labeling.”

Miguel Valenzuela, who operated the affected kennel at the time of the incident, has since moved out of the country, Byers said. Valenzuela couldn’t be reached for comment.

Seminole Animal Supply in Altamonte Springs supplied the meat to the affected kennel and others at the kennel club, said Mark Nichols, who manages the store. Seminole Animal Supply also sells raw meat to other tracks throughout Florida and to walk-in customers, Nichols added.

State records show that no other kennels reported problems. Nichols said none of his other customers have informed him of any similar illnesses.

Victory Greyhound, a feed company in La Motte, Iowa, supplied the meat to Seminole Animal Supply, records show.

The Florida Department of Agriculture generally looks into these types of cases to determine if others who bought from the same lot of meat should be concerned.

“Handling procedures utilized in the preparation of the food provided to the affected greyhounds would significantly increase the risk for rapid development of pathogenic microorganisms that may not have otherwise been present in the individual products in their original state,” said Shaness Thomas, the agriculture department’s environmental manager for its Feed and Seed Compliant Section, in a June 10 memo to Brian Wall, an investigator with the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation.

The agriculture department is no longer looking into the issue because no other cases of illness have been reported.

Carey Theil, executive director of Grey 2K USA, an organization that is working to abolish commercial greyhound racing, said he would like to see the racing industry re-evaluate how it feeds its dogs.

“We will never know definitely what the exact cause of death in this case was,” Theil said. “We do know for a fact that the industry uses a cheap meat product from downed animals as a way to reduce costs ... Whether or not that was the case here, I think it is a bad idea for the industry to use (such) meat.”

Victory Greyhound’s feed consists of muscle meat from beef carcasses deemed unfit for human consumption, but Jason Haynes, the company’s owner, said the meat is safe for greyhounds as long as it’s handled properly.

“If (caretakers) handle the product the way they’d handle meat for their family,

they'd be pretty safe," he said.

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