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NYS GAMING COMMISSION WILL ISSUE 10-YEAR SUSPENSIONS FOR COBALT VIOLATIONS

The New York State Gaming Commission today announced that it will issue a standard 10-year suspension to anyone who violates the harness rule prohibiting the use of substances that abnormally oxygenate a horse's blood, including supra-dietary administration of cobalt salts.

Cobalt salts have a number of industrial and agricultural uses, but are not intended for administration to horses.

"The Commission will not allow those seeking to cheat to undercut New York's world-class racing program," said Commission Executive Director Robert Williams. "We take seriously any practices that compromise the health and safety of race horses. Equine Medical Director Scott Palmer and the New York Drug Testing and Research Laboratory have instituted a comprehensive program to identify violations and will continue to vigilantly advocate for the horse and the public."

Cobalt, a naturally-occurring element with properties similar to those of iron and nickel, is found in low levels in many horse feeds and vitamin supplements such as Vitamin B12 formulations. Low levels of cobalt are present in all horses and are not considered to be harmful.

Large doses can cause cobalt toxicity associated with myocardial and other organ pathology in humans and other animals. The detection of abnormally high levels of cobalt in the blood of racehorses results from cobalt being administered to impermissibly enhance aerobic performance through illicit blood doping, similar to the prohibited administration of erythropoietin (EPO).

Administration of cobalt salts by oral or intravenous treatment will cause an abnormal increase in serum cobalt levels that the New York Drug Testing and Research Laboratory can detect and is actively monitoring. To enhance the efficacy of this new program, the Commission is not currently publishing the laboratory threshold for cobalt.

The Commission's rule prohibits only the supra-dietary administration of cobalt. The administration of feed supplements and vitamins containing cobalt will increase the serum level of cobalt to a degree consistent with oral supplementation, but will not create the abnormally high levels that result from the administration of cobalt salts. Oral administration of commercially available Vitamin B feed supplements cannot elevate serum cobalt to a level that will create a positive regulatory finding. Water-soluble cobalt salts,

however, deliver a supra-dietary dose of cobalt. Such administrations induce a marked and stable polycythemic response (increase in the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood) through a more efficient transcription of the erythropoietin gene.

The Commission is considering a similar rule for Thoroughbred racing. The harness rule went into effect last month.

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