

Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

Risk is a part of our everyday lives and there is attendant risk associated with Thoroughbred racing. In recent years the number of racing fatalities in North America has declined. The conscientious use of risk management techniques, including the introduction of protective factors, have been proven to be successful in reducing the risk of injury to racehorses. However, the use of risk management programs is not uniformly practiced across all racing jurisdictions. The development of a strategic plan to reduce equine fatalities in the Mid-Atlantic region is an effort to develop and share regional best practices and communication tools that can be used to minimize equine fatalities on a broad scale.

CORE OPERATING VALUES:

- We acknowledge that the horse is at the very core of our business model and we will dedicate our best efforts to minimize risk of injury.
- Our commitment to stewardship of the horse is central to our mission.
- These efforts will not only serve the horse, but will also minimize risk of injury of jockeys, exercise riders and backstretch workers.
- We will use evidence-based decision making to assure the integrity of this process at every level.

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS:

- Equine and human safety is our “North Star.”
- It is possible to reduce equine fatalities with risk management
- Informed decisions are made with the best interests of the horse in mind.
- Best practices can be developed and we must be willing to embrace change.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Mid-Atlantic Thoroughbred Racing Safety Program is to reduce exercise-based injuries and equine fatalities using evidence-based best practices applied in a collaborative multi-jurisdiction program. The Program will work with Mid-Atlantic industry stakeholders and Thoroughbred racing and equine experts to develop and continually improve best practices and to implement them at every racetrack in the region. The Program will also work to educate all stakeholders and the general public about these initiatives and the positive results achieved. The paramount goal is protection of

the horses and, by extension, the jockeys, exercise riders and backstretch workers. Publicizing the efforts of racing stakeholders on behalf of the horses will also strengthen the confidence of the general public in Thoroughbred racing. New owners will be encouraged to invest in the sport and will contribute to sustainable growth of the racing industry in the Mid-Atlantic region. The advancement of the Mid-Atlantic Thoroughbred racing industry will increase the economic impact in our communities and provide expanded opportunities for employment and preservation of open space.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: Mid-Atlantic Jurisdictions will:

- Assume a leadership role in developing regional best practices for safety.
- Enlist and leverage support of industry stakeholders and regulators and the world-wide scientific community.
- Establish uniform best practices.
- Educate racing stakeholders.
- Communicate our efforts to the general public.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal I: Develop regional safety best practices

- Perform postmortem examinations in all jurisdictions.
- Create mortality review boards in all jurisdictions.
- Hire an Equine Medical Director or designate a Chief Regulatory Veterinarian in each jurisdiction to administer the Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan.
- Perform an annual regional racing fatality analysis to track the incidence of equine fatalities in all Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions.
- Require all racetracks in the Mid-Atlantic Region to report to the EID.
- Upgrade the functionality of the EID.
- Identify regional risk factors for Thoroughbred racehorses racing in the Mid-Atlantic region.
- Develop regulatory practices to promote safety (Develop an Internal Control Program).
- Inter-jurisdictional maintenance and use of Veterinarian's Lists to prevent horses from entering without meeting uniform criteria for establishing fitness to race (Adopt ARCI model rule for this).
- Establish and expand existing racehorse aftercare programs
- Develop a metric to accurately document the incidence of training fatalities in all Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions.

Goal II: Increase awareness and understanding of conditions associated with injury

- Partner with educators to create a curriculum for all stakeholders, starting with trainers
- Develop live and on-line delivery systems to make information accessible to stakeholders (Partner with The Jockey Club, NTRA, AAEP, Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania faculty).
- Provide regular research updates.

Goal III: Develop improved methods to identify horses at increased risk of injury

- Identify exercise history patterns, clinical examination findings and digital radiographic findings that are associated with fatal musculoskeletal injury.
- Develop inexpensive, accurate and readily-available screening tools.
- Train horsemen and veterinarians to perform risk assessment on all horses in their care (Example: See “Introduction to Risk and Protective Factors” in The Jockey Club Advanced Horsemanship on-line CE program).

Goal IV: Identify and implement protective factors that will reduce the risk of injury

- Create a list of best practices that can be used by horsemen to reduce the risk of injury and communicate these best practices to decision-makers.
- Develop standardized SOPs for out-of-competition screening of horses that are at increased risk for injury (NY and CA collaborate with The Jockey Club InCompass Solutions programmers to do this).
- Contract with knowledgeable experts to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the racing surfaces, using best practices established by the Racing Surface Testing Laboratory, well in advance of the opening of race meets and review during a race meet in order to ensure a consistent and safe racing surface.
- Promote adoption of these best practices in all jurisdictions.

Goal V: Improve general horse health

- Employ biosecurity best practices in individual stables (AAEP consult).
- Employ racetrack-level biosecurity best practices (AAEP consult).
- Create accurate individual medical records for all horses (AAEP consult).
- Ensure that medical records accompany horses when they change hands.

Roles and accountability of Stakeholders

The following comments were offered as examples of the roles that individual stakeholders can play in accomplishing this mission. These comments can be used to refine objectives or create protective factors that can be used to minimize the risk of injury.

- Caregivers should focus upon use of disease-modifying therapy rather than symptomatic treatment of lameness. Lameness is a symptom of an underlying condition that must be identified and treated.
- Veterinarians should advocate for the best care for individual horses rather than simply providing the same treatment for all horses, often at the trainer's request.
- **Horses should not be treated with any medication in the absence of a veterinary diagnosis. Diagnostic work enables treatment that prevents a minor injury from becoming a serious one later on.**
- Communication of horse medical or lameness conditions should involve the horse owner as well as the trainer.
- Treatment decisions should be made with horse welfare in mind.
- The more that owners are informed about the condition of their horses, the better.
- Expanded use of aftercare programs have helped to reduce fatalities by providing a practical alternative to keeping horses in training that may be at increased risk of injury.
- Racetrack maintenance protocols to ensure a consistent surface for training in the mornings is a protective factor that can help to reduce training injuries.
- We should identify and address the risks associated with year-round racing schedules.
- Racing offices should not put pressure on horsepersons to fill races. This practice can put horses at increased risk.
- We should standardize and improve the pre-race examination protocols. This is the last line of defense for the horse.
- There should be good communication between stakeholders on horse health issues and we should not be afraid to take steps to rectify a problem.
- We should regulate shock wave therapy to prevent horses from training or racing during a period of reduced pain sensation in the area of treatment.
- We should do whatever is necessary to make jockeys comfortable to let the regulatory veterinarian at the gate know if a horse should be scratched before the race.
- We should document rider injuries in a database and share this information among Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions.
- We should make uniform claiming regulations in the Mid-Atlantic region that protect the horse.

- Horses should be scratched if there is any problem that would put them at increased risk.
- Safety stewards should be hired in all racing jurisdictions, with a job description that includes tasks intended to reduce catastrophic injury.
- We should communicate that it is everyone's duty to make sure horses and riders are well cared-for.
- There should be adherence to, and compliance with, the NTRA Safety & Integrity Alliance Code of Standards. Make a list of all NTRA Accredited racetracks in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

Action List for Mid-Atlantic Stakeholders:

1. Create an Administration Committee composed of regulators, horsemen, racetrack officials and veterinarians to administer the strategic plan:
 - a. Set priorities for each of the five Goals in the Strategic Plan.
 - b. Establish outcome measures for each of the objectives.
 - c. Monitor progress in achieving the outcomes of the Strategic Plan.
 - d. Create a schedule for teleconference meetings to enable administration of the plan.
2. Create a Communications Committee to provide information to the general public regarding Mid-Atlantic efforts to reduce equine fatalities in our region.
3. Create an Education Committee to develop the curriculum for continuing education for stakeholders.
4. Create a Regulatory Veterinarian Committee to administer tasks related to uniform regulatory policy throughout the Mid-Atlantic region.
5. Create a Practicing Veterinarian Committee to administer tasks related to expanding the role of private practitioners in reducing equine injuries in the Mid-Atlantic region.
6. Identify a veterinarian from the Mid-Atlantic region to serve as a liaison with the AAEP to accomplish goals in which the AAEP offers expertise and experience (e.g.: Goal V and many of the items included in the stakeholder roles).

Mid-Atlantic Racetracks currently accredited by the NTRA Safety & Integrity Alliance:

1. Saratoga Race Course
2. Belmont Park Race Course

3. Aqueduct Racetrack
4. Finger Lakes Gaming and Racetrack
5. Monmouth Park Racetrack
6. Pimlico Racecourse
7. Laurel Park Racetrack