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Combined Effort

Dr. Scott Palmer, equine medical director
for the New York State Gaming Commission

Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities sees progress



BY FRANK ANGST

IN AN INDUSTRY that sometimes can be short on cooperation and shorter on uniformity, the Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities has brought the region's major players together for the common goal of improving equine safety.

The sustained effort by Mid-Atlantic tracks, regulators, horsemen's groups, track and regulatory veterinarians, and breeders' groups is bearing fruit. The equine fatality rate in the region—Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia—has dropped significantly in recent years.

A natural growth out of regional efforts such as the Mid-Atlantic Uniform Medication and Drug Testing Program, which greatly improved uniformity on medication issues in the region before morphing into the national effort of the National Uniform Medication Program, the Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities was founded in March 2019 by Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association chairman and CEO Alan Foreman and New York

2021 LEADING SIRES IN NEW YORK

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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2021 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	CENTRAL BANKER (10, Speightstown), McMahon of Saratoga Thoroughbreds	\$6,000	42/8	0/0	0/0	(Bank Sting, \$38,500)	\$329,958	196	6	1.34	1.19
2	BIG BROWN (05, Boundary), Irish Hill & Dutchess Views Stallions	\$5,000	48/7	0/0	0/0	(Jemography, \$85,800)	\$273,474	*838	26	1.04	1.44
3	MISSION IMPAZIBLE (07, Unbridled's Song), Sequel Stallions New York	\$2,500	32/7	0/0	0/0	(Impazible Donna, \$39,600)	\$223,281	267	7	1.11	1.18
4	BUSTIN STONES (04, City Zip), Waldorf Farm	\$2,500	21/5	0/0	0/0	(Shaker Shack, \$23,650)	\$133,336	241	10	1.33	1.29
5	HONORABLE DILLON (10, Tapit)	N/A	11/2	0/0	0/0	(Awesome Debate, \$85,800)	\$132,687	112	0	0.55	1.07
6	COURAGEOUS CAT (06, Storm Cat), Questroyal North	\$2,500	19/4	1/1	1/1	(Our Last Buck, \$55,000)	\$120,629	226	8	0.89	1.06
7	BELLAMY ROAD (02, Concerto), Irish Hill & Dutchess Views Stallions	\$5,000	42/4	0/0	0/0	(Shanes Pretty Lady, \$23,040)	\$119,650	*721	32	1.13	1.23
8	FREUD (98, Storm Cat), Sequel Stallions New York	\$5,000	35/3	0/0	0/0	(It's Gravy, \$38,500)	\$118,061	*1361	54	1.47	1.22
9	MICROMANAGE (10, Medaglia d'Oro), Rockridge Stud	\$2,500	15/4	0/0	0/0	(Microscope, \$42,560)	\$105,924	69	0	0.77	1.28
10	TEUFLESBERG (04, Johannesburg), McMahon of Saratoga Thoroughbreds	\$2,000	16/3	0/0	0/0	(Writer's Regret, \$30,250)	\$86,219	173	4	1.16	1.06

State Gaming Commission Equine Medical Director Dr. Scott Palmer.

While the Mid-Atlantic plan will soon celebrate its second anniversary, Foreman noted the region has a long history of cooperation and many of its previous efforts have gone on to improve equine safety and become national standards. He said the region put the first uniform licensing program in place many years ago and took the lead on banning anabolic steroids in racing in the fall of 2008. The New York Task Force on Racehorse Health and Safety of 2012 made 38 recommendations and found support from horsemen on 37.

After that report, Foreman recalls New York horsemen such as the late Rick Violette, who was president of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, noting real strides in safety would only arrive if surrounding jurisdictions bought in. He said that there was nothing in the recommendations that shouldn't be embraced by horsemen throughout the region.

That rang true with Foreman. In some initial moves to bring about regional change, Foreman recalls horsemen from PARX Racing calling for uniform medication rules—which, of course, are a big part of improving equine safety. Music to his ears, Foreman enthusiastically embraced that call.

Working with Palmer, Foreman helped launch efforts that took the form of the Mid-Atlantic Uniform Medication and Drug Testing Program.

"There were all of these disparate policies and protocols that had been developed for the industry but had not been tied together," Foreman said of the need for uniformity.

That program would develop a con-

trolled therapeutic substances list out of meetings with the scientific community—bringing clarity on what substances had an accepted role in racing as therapeutics and what substances did not belong in racing. It saw policies to keep vets out of stalls on race-day through third-party Lasix administration and a points system to levy additional sanctions for horsemen with multiple violations.

If those policies sound familiar, it might be because they became pillars in the launch of the National Uniform Medication Program under the industry's Racing Medication and Testing Consortium.

In that spirit of regional cooperation to improve the game, Foreman and Palmer worked to bring uniformity and best practices to the region in terms of safety standards with the launch of the Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities. While the effort had been planned for about a year, it coincided with a tough time for United States racing in terms of equine safety because of a rash of breakdowns at Santa Anita Park.

In September 2019 former New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association executive director Andy Belfiore was named project director of the Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities. Belfiore said her experience in working in aftercare has proved helpful with both her organizational skills and getting people to the table.

"You're always working with a diverse group of people and you're trying to figure out a way to get them all to speak the same language and be on the same page," Belfiore said. "As Scott (Palmer) was saying, sometimes you have to hone in on your 'inner nag' because people are busy.

They've got a lot of things going on. And you really need to be able to remind them, 'Did this get done?' or, 'Where are we at on this one,' to make sure that we're not just rubber-stamping things but ensuring that they're actually implementing these things.

"We're seeing the results. They are implementing the various best practices. Their regulations are being changed, and there's real progress that's being made."

A visit to the Mid-Atlantic plan's informative and well-organized web site quickly serves as a reminder that these kinds of improvements are not just coincidentally happening. They're the result of many, many hours of work from identifying the problem to researching the problem to finding solutions to putting those measures in place. The causes of equine injuries are multi-factorial, so addressing the problem requires attacking the problem from many angles.

As part of the effort, Palmer has implemented strategic gap analysis, a business management technique that requires an evaluation of the difference between an endeavor's best possible outcome and the actual outcome. Palmer said it's an approach that helped ensure recommendations in the New York Task Force report become reality. It was natural to bring the same approach to the region on these issues. Foreman says it's basically a report card (see tables on page 50) on how the region is doing on equine safety.

Progress is readily noted. In October 2019 the region saw 100% of its states have restrictions on stacking medications, requirements of vets to keep medical records, preventative biosecurity measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, alerts for the racing office for horses on

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1	WICKED STRONG (11, Hard Spun), Pin Oak Lane Farm	\$3,500	78/13	0/0	0/0	(Jilted Bride, \$50,400)	\$323,425	*258	3	0.89	1.28
2	JUMP START (99, A.P. Indy)	Died, 2019	52/10	0/0	0/0	(Jump for Joy, \$45,100)	\$273,522	*1488	53	1.39	1.26
3	EL PADRINO (09, Pulpit)	Died, 2017	34/7	0/0	0/0	(Too Boss, \$44,000)	\$206,651	188	4	1.31	1.25
4	SMARTY JONES (01, Elusive Quality), Equistar Training and Breeding	\$3,500	22/5	0/0	0/0	(Ujjayi, \$70,800)	\$202,756	*825	27	1.35	1.66
5	FLASHBACK (10, Tapit), Diamond B Farm	\$3,500	35/5	0/0	0/0	(Roux Ga Roux, \$30,000)	\$176,544	255	2	1.01	1.53
6	BOISTEROUS (07, Distorted Humor), Diamond B Farm	\$3,000	28/4	0/0	0/0	(Loud Mouth, \$59,700)	\$164,533	136	2	0.86	1.06
7	WARRIOR'S REWARD (06, Medaglia d'Oro), WynOaks Farm	\$5,000	54/8	0/0	0/0	(Kinabalu Warrior, \$24,158)	\$143,897	*628	20	1.02	1.32
8	POSEIDON'S WARRIOR (08, Speightstown), Equistar Training and Breeding	\$3,000	42/7	0/0	0/0	(My Lovely Girl, \$20,325)	\$141,494	*231	2	0.97	1.08
9	NORMANDY INVASION (10, Tapit), Pin Oak Lane Farm	Pnsd	15/4	0/0	0/0	(Have a Heart, \$25,000)	\$115,167	85	0	0.51	1.16
10	WEIGLIA (01, Safely's Mark), WynOaks Farm	Private	22/4	0/0	0/0	(Beren, \$44,800)	\$114,434	*169	7	1.36	1.05

the vet's list, protocols for handling entry for a horse on the vet's list, creation of track-specific fatality databases, and reporting of all fatalities to The Jockey Club Equine Injury Database.

By October 2020 those seven initiatives were still in place at all the jurisdictions while five more reached 100% status, including voided claim rules that protect horses, necropsy examinations for all equine fatalities, mortality review boards, pre-race inspections, and crisis management communication.

By documenting progress and keeping the effort organized, states are less likely to fall through the cracks. Industry-best practices are communicated from members who have put such measures in place and have seen results while those lagging behind might feel something akin to peer pressure to catch up.

The approach is yielding results. According to Palmer and including previous efforts in the region, the rate of fatalities per 1,000 starts dropped significantly

from an average of 2.4 from 2010-14; to 1.8 from 2015-19. Through the first 11 months of 2020, it was reduced to 1.21—21% lower than the 2019 national average of 1.53 as documented by The Jockey Club Equine Injury Database.

Palmer takes on challenges beyond his regulatory role in New York because reducing equine fatalities is one of his life's goals. Seeing the region's improved equine safety numbers puts a bounce in his step.

"That's a big deal, you know for 14 race-tracks in seven states. It's extremely gratifying," Palmer said, adding that there's never a time to raise the victory flag. "People ask me if I'm happy with that, and I am. I'm satisfied, but then I always think we can do better."

"You keep working it and working it. You analyze your metrics, see how things are going. You identify risk and then you address the risk, then you identify. You go back and look at your metrics and say, 'Is this working or not?'"

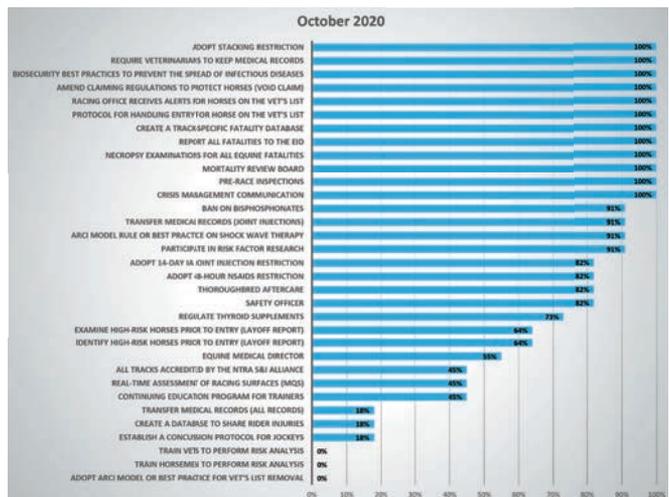
Another strength of the Mid-Atlantic

plan is that it provides a vehicle to address emerging equine safety concerns swiftly. When Palmer noted that testing of the 100 horses previously conditioned by trainers indicted on federal charges in March 2020—Jason Servis and Jorge Navarro—revealed 77% tested positive for clenbuterol, the Mid-Atlantic Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities quickly defined the problem, determined rule updates, and is working to put them in place. The changes aim to remove clenbuterol use from racing and ensure it is not used in a muscle-building regimen.

With Palmer's findings, the rule changes quickly garnered support.

"It didn't take much convincing. I mean there really was no pushback," Belfiore said. "It was quite clear from the evidence Scott had that there was a problem and clenbuterol was not being used appropriately. It was put on the table at the October meeting last year; it was approved unanimously."

"Except for West Virginia, everybody's going to have it implemented for their



The region's strategic gap analysis documents progress from October 2019 to October 2020

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									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	GOLDEN LAD (10, Medaglia d'Oro), Northview Stallion Station	\$5,000	31/10	1/1	0/1	(Hello Beautiful, \$60,000)	\$336,876	152	3	1.53	1.32
2	BANDBOX (08, Tapit), Northview Stallion Station	\$2,500	34/8	0/0	0/0	(Be Good, \$25,853)	\$270,620	95	2	1.38	1.30
3	GREAT NOTION (00, Elusive Quality), Northview Stallion Station	\$7,500	34/8	1/1	0/1	(Kenny Had a Notion, \$60,000)	\$250,950	426	26	1.49	1.21
4	BOURBON COURAGE (09, Lion Heart), Anchor & Hope Farm	\$2,000	30/4	0/0	0/0	(Double Shot, \$46,800)	\$197,671	108	2	1.20	1.13
5	IMAGINING (08, Giant's Causeway), Anchor & Hope Farm	\$2,000	28/7	0/0	0/0	(Proper Attire, \$31,122)	\$179,863	115	1	0.99	1.37
6	MOSLER (11, War Front), Country Life Farm	\$4,000	14/6	1/1	0/1	(Hello Hot Rod, \$55,000)	\$161,226	96	2	0.99	1.29

meets this year. West Virginia, unfortunately, has to go through a legislative process in order to change rules. So they are planning to have that in place in 2022.”

When new policies and ideas are brought to fruition, the Mid-Atlantic plan puts a lot of emphasis on communicating this information to the sport’s participants and the public. Rather than provide massive reports that might never be read by horsemen, the strategic plan offers guides with bullet-point highlights for trainers to focus on day to day—effectively turning recommendations into reality.

“It’s critical,” Palmer said. “Education is the first step in everything we’ve done. We have to get this information in the hands of people. They have to understand what a risk factor is. This can’t work unless the horsemen get trained to do this stuff and are able to do it every day. That’s a challenge and so a one-page handout is a beautiful thing.”

In an industry that might be more tied to government than ever before because of money from added gaming going to the sport, Foreman noted that it’s important to have this information on record to counter misleading information from groups that oppose racing. He said the information outlining the equine safety progress in the region proved important in sealing last year’s deal among The Stronach Group’s Maryland Jockey Club, Baltimore, and the state to rebuild Pimlico Race Course and keep the Preakness Stakes (G1) home.

“This plan has been invaluable to Maryland, to the Maryland legislature, and the success of passing the redevelopment plan that will create the new Pimlico,” Foreman said. “At the time that this was all hap-

pening, the *Washington Post* had written an editorial that it was time for the end of horse racing.

“The local stakeholders had to go before legislative committees and defend why they should continue to provide support for the racing industry. When we brought the redevelopment plan last year to the legislature, we specifically had not only provisions for an equine safety and welfare committee to report annually to the General Assembly on what we are doing for the safety and welfare of the horse, but also in that plan, is the construction of an adequate safety, health, and research center.

“That is all designed to demonstrate substantively how seriously we take the issue of safety and welfare of the horse. We’ve been able to use the Mid-Atlantic plan specifically as a demonstration of the commitment of Maryland horsemen, and the horsemen in the region, to the safety and welfare of the horse.”

While Foreman has preferred the industry improve its standards from within, under the current state regulatory system, he also maintains that if efforts to move oversight of the sport’s medication and equine drug testing from states to an anti-doping authority put in place by federal legislation become reality, that authority should also have oversight of equine safety. That ultimately is one of the changes, along with a compromise on race-day Lasix, put in place in the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act put forth by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, which would pass late last year.

Will that legislation remove the need for the regional effort? Time will tell, but or-

ganizers believe the Mid-Atlantic plan certainly will be needed through the launch of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority by July 2022, during some period of time converting to the new oversight, and, even after.

“We’re making great strides here, and it’s going to go nationally. It is in place right now in the Mid-Atlantic region, and it’s going to be a model,” said Palmer, who expects the risk management program to be part of HISA’s equine safety efforts. “I think that it’s exciting. I’m curious but somewhat concerned about the transition that’s going to take place in a couple of years.”

Even after HISA is in place, Foreman expects a continued need for the region to communicate its safety findings and experiences.

“We are going to have a serious advocacy role going forward. The authority is going to adopt rules,” Foreman said. “We’re going to have to go through a rule-making process just like rules are adopted now for policies or protocols. So I think our work becomes even more important because we have the largest region in the country. I think we can play a very useful role in the implementation of new policy and bring proposed policies back to the group for feedback.”

As for making any needed adjustments on safety protocols and standards under HISA, Foreman suspects the region is well-prepared.

“It’s not going to be a real heavy lift for the Mid-Atlantic to adhere to the new coming standards because we’re already doing it,” Foreman said. “We’re living it here.” **BH**

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in the selected region (stallions that have died or been exported prior to the 2016 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available Northern Hemisphere statistics through February 14, 2021. As supplied to *The Blood-Horse* by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings include adjusted money from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Adjusted earnings are put on par with average North American earnings from the previous year. For example, the average North American purse in 2019 is \$25,300 or 53% of the 2019 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 53% before being credited to a sire’s progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 17%; Singapore by 85%. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled black-type stakes winners worldwide. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners include all countries. (A ¶ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).