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May 4, 2009

Notice to the Industry

Veterinarian Glenn T. Johnston suspended - DPO prescribed for horses

As a result of an ongoing investigation by the industry-funded Equine Medication Control and Drug Task Force, on April 30, 2009 the Director ordered the immediate suspension of the Ontario Racing Commission (ORC) licence of veterinarian Glenn T. Johnston of Essex, ON. In addition, the Director has issued a proposed order to suspend his licence for a period of 12 years, and ordered a \$ 50,000 fine.

Investigators had received information that a number of prescriptions were being written for the drug Aranesp®, and were being filled at local area pharmacies. Aranesp is a brand name form of darbepoetin-alfa.

Darbepoetin-alfa (DPO) is classed as a potent long-lasting form of Erythropoietin (EPO). In April of 2006, the ORC issued a Notice to the Industry advising all Ontario racing industry licensees that severe penalties will be imposed on anyone found to have acquired, be in possession of, or administered the drug Aranesp to a horse. Evidence presented at ORC hearings and warnings in additional Notices have confirmed that EPO/DPO has no legitimate use for a horse that is racing. It not only places the horse at risk, it imperils the future of the horse racing industry.

By far the majority of the tens of thousands of people who make up Ontario's horse racing community play by the rules and care passionately about the welfare of the horse. With its support of the Task Force, that community has sent a clear message to the handful of rule-breakers: the acquisition, possession, administration, as well as the prescription of illegal and non-therapeutic drugs will not be tolerated.

John L. Blakney
Executive Director

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