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Facility at A&M will test dogs, horses for drugs

By Lucinda Orr
Reporter

The Texas A&M facility designated to perform drug tests on horses and dogs racing at Texas tracks has been preparing for its new role after Gov. Bill Clements recently appointed the first four members to the Texas Racing Commission, which will oversee the program.

Dr. Allen Ray, veterinary toxicologist of the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab in charge of this testing, says that the TVMDL is waiting for the six-member commission to be appointed and start setting up the rules and procedures for the project.

Senate Bill 15 requires that both horse and dog interests be represented in the Commission, so there will be one large-animal vet, one small-animal vet, two members of the general public in any profession who have an interest or knowledge of horse racing and two for dog racing. Four commission members were appointed last Friday.

Dr. Demarius Frey, a small-animal vet from Corpus Christi, is a member of the Texas Thoroughbred Breeders Association and the Texas Horse Racing Association. She was named in 1979 by Clements to serve as the first woman on the Texas Veterinary Medical Examiners Board, a position she held until 1985.

James H. Clement, King Ranch chairman since 1974, is a director of the Texas Research League and the Texas and Southwest Cattle Raisers Association.

Hugh Fitzsimons, managing partner of a ranching company in Carizzo Springs, is also a director of the cattle-raisers association and served on the Texas Aeronautics Commission from 1966-72.

A.L. Mangham, banker and former mayor of Nacogdoches, will serve as dog-racing representative.

"The ones they have to appoint next will be an equine (horse) vet and another public member for dog-racing," Ray says.

One of the Commission's jobs is to decide what drugs will be allowed and what drugs and dosages will be considered illegal.

"They will probably examine other states' decisions and rely heavily on that," Ray says.

Licensing requirements for tracks and trainers, security enforcement and the transportation of samples to be tested are other matters to be worked out.

"They could use state employees, Department of Public Safety officers or private couriers," Ray says.

Senate Bill 15 allots no money to the TVMDL. It will receive a loan from the General Revenue fund, which it must pay back with interest.

"The project will be totally self-supporting from the money earned through testing fees," Ray says.

"Fees will probably be about \$25 per sample," Ray says. "They will be higher at first, but as the number of samples increases, the cost per sample will decrease."

"Multiply that by the thirty to fifty thousand samples we'll be getting each year — you see how much we'll be making."

For the TVMDL to accomplish such an undertaking, they had to create a new department. What used to be a division of the toxicology department will be one of the biggest sections of the TVMDL.

Facilities will be remodeled and new equipment purchased.

Four animal rooms that housed experimental animals such as rats, mice and guinea pigs and a restroom will be the five rooms converted during renovation. The rooms are now primitive, with cement floors and ceilings to the roof.

The TVMDL will need several hundred-thousand dollars of sophisticated, state-of-the-art equipment for the testing and analysis, but finances are uncertain.

"We may have to buy only the minimum amount, or we could go deluxe — we'll just have to see how much money they'll give (loan) us," Ray says. He says he hopes the labs can be ready by this fall.

Currently, the TVMDL handles drug testing to help vets with therapeutic monitoring and detecting misuse of drugs. It has also handled poisoning cases such as deaths of overinsured horses, or small animals that were killed by common drugs like aspirin, Tylenol, Valium and cold medicines.

It is very likely that once in full swing, the TVMDL may handle 30,000 to 50,000 samples per year for the drug testing as related to pari-mutuel racing, he says.

He expects more positive tests during the first one or two years, until people learn what is legal, what is not and what they can get away with.

Eventually, the TVMDL will have to add about 12 new employees in this department, with maybe three or four positions for students.

There will be extensive training and learning, Ray will travel to other labs to learn their procedures to teach his staff and experts also will come in to instruct.

Ray says that the positive samples require the most expertise, but that usually less than one percent of samples test positive.

Once trained, the department will probably receive certification from the board of quality control.

Senate Bill 15 allows four Class One horse tracks in the state and specifies that they may be built in Harris, Bexar, Dallas and Tarrant counties.

"We're basically talking about Houston, San Antonio, Dallas and Fort Worth," Ray says.

Class One tracks must have at least 45 racing days per year.

Ray says Class Two tracks may have no more than 44 racing days per year and may be built anywhere, while Class Three tracks are allowed a maximum of 16 racing days.

Dog-racing tracks are specified

for Galveston, Nueces and Comal counties and probably will be in Galveston, Corpus Christi, Brownsville, Ray says.

If the Commission follows states, post-race drug tests are done.

Urine samples will be collected from the horses and dogs at races and sent to the TVMDL for analysis. Ray says that drugs found in higher concentrations over longer periods of time in urine is a better test than blood work.

But he says it also has some advantages.

"The body will often react to a drug, and alter its chemistry," Ray says. "Testing is then complicated, because then you're dealing with metabolites rather than the parent drug. To be certain of the standards of control samples be established, requiring the synthesis or biological reproduction such as test tube samples with zymes or liver cells."

Under unusual circumstances if foul play is suspected, the procedure requires all the horses to be tested.

Ray says test results are available within a week of the race.

"This will put pressure on a quick answers, so the purse is released," Ray says.

Of the money bet on a race, a percentage goes to the winner. A fair percentage makes up the purse (small amounts do not make the good horses), some go to the track and the rest goes to the commission, Ray explains.

Ray's opinion is that Texas racing season could make the program successful. Northern tracks have less racing days because of temperatures, but Florida has off-season.

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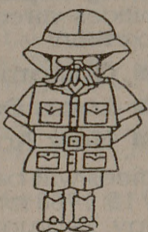
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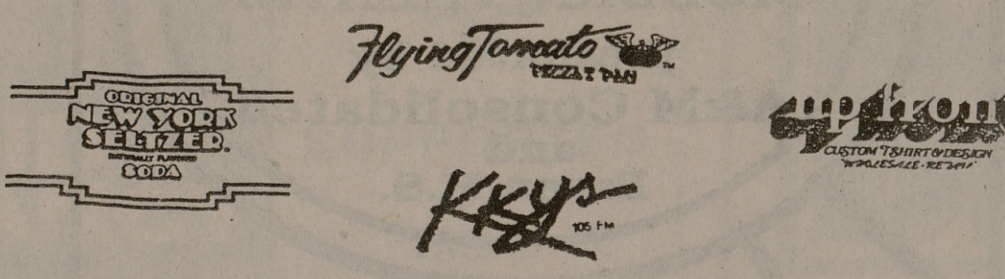


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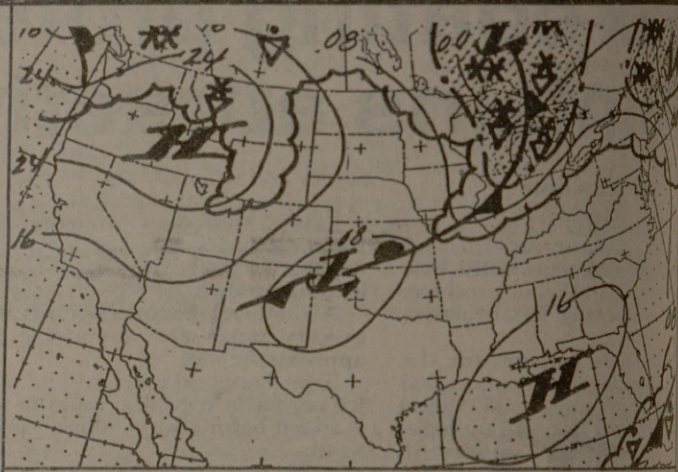
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- Thunderstorm
- Drizzle
- Freezing Rain

Sunset Today: 6:13 p.m. Sunrise Wednesday: 7:03 a.m.

Map Discussion: The eastward progression of Pacific weather systems combined with the western most system being off the British Columbia and Washington coastal area, another to the north of the Great Lakes, and a third exiting the New England coastal sections. The system over the Great Lakes will produce only scattered snowshowers over Southern Canada and the Northern Great Lakes. The system over Maine, with southerly flow and meager energy, is acting more like a springtime system rather than a winter event. Meanwhile, Bryan-College Station will be dominated by the return flow from the south, being on the back edge of the high in the Gulf of Mexico.

Forecast:

Today: Partly cloudy and warm, high near 72. Winds will be southerly at eight to 12 mph through the morning, becoming 12 with gusts to near 20 in the afternoon.

Tonight: Fair and mild. Low near 40. Wind south at 5 mph.

Wednesday: Increasing cloudiness and cooler. High near 60. West winds at 14 mph through the morning, becoming northerly at 18 mph.

Weather Fact: "Texas Norther" - A cold air outbreak associated with the southward movement of a cold high pressure system. It is usually preceded by warm and cloudy conditions and southerly winds and sometimes by rain. The "Norther" brings a sudden temperature drop, sometimes as much as 25 degrees per hour to 50 degrees in three hours. It usually lasts from two to four days; however on rare occasions, it may persist for a week.

Prepared by: Charlie Smith
Staff Meteorologist
A&M Department of Meteorology

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