Office of Veterinary Affairs

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NEW YORK STATE | Gaming Commission

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Air Quality Protocol

Particulates in the atmosphere can build up in both horse and human respiratory systems causing serious health problems including irritation of the eyes and respiratory tract. Poor air quality can irritate pre-existing conditions, including asthma in people and recurrent airway obstruction, or heaves, in horses, as well as Exercise-Induced Pulmonary Hemorrhage. High concentrations of smoke and particulates can cause persistent cough, nasal discharge, and wheezing, and increased effort to breathe and can alter the immune system.

To that end, we advise interested parties to review:
- UC Davis guidelines for horses exposed to wildfire smoke.
- Equestrian Canada's Guidelines for Equine Competition and Training during Extreme Environmental Conditions

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency publishes an air quality index (AQI), which considers the amount of particle pollution, ground-level ozone, and toxic gases (carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide) in the air. The AQI varies from location to location and changes throughout the day. The AQI is available on both Android and iOS applications and can be searched by location.

The EPA has established a six color-coded tool for communicating about outdoor air quality and health. The colors correspond to a range of index values. The higher the AQI value, the greater the health concern. The chart has been replicated below.

Effective immediately:

While the AQI is under 150:
- Horsepersons should monitor their horses for signs of respiratory inflammation and contact their attending veterinarian to evaluate horses exhibiting coughing, respiratory distress, nasal discharge, or fever.
- It is otherwise safe to exercise or race horses at these AQI levels.

Once the AQI reaches 150:
- The chief veterinarian of the racing association at which training or racing is conducted shall contact the stewards or presiding judges and track management to advise them of the presence of an elevated AQI.
- The chief veterinarian, stewards or presiding judges, horsepersons, jockeys, drivers, outriders, and racetrack management shall collectively determine whether to cancel racing.
- The steward or presiding judge and equine medical director retains authority to unilaterally intervene, as they determine circumstances warrant.

Provided that:

If the AQI is between 151 and 200:
- No horse will be allowed to workout or race unless their attending veterinarian certifies that the horse will not be adversely affected by the elevated AQI.
- If an entered horse evidenced a respiratory issue, the horse must be declared unfit and scratched without penalty.
  - Under present practice, the horse would be placed on the Veterinarian's List when scratched.

- Horses declared fit to race must be closely scrutinized before and after racing to ensure that they are not experiencing clinical signs of respiratory distress.
  - Pre-race examinations of association veterinarians should include auscultation of the lungs and airways.

If the AQI reaches 201: No racing or training may be conducted.

Thank you for your efforts to provide the best possible care for your horses. As stewards of the horse, we must do what can to ensure their health and safety.

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U.S. Air Quality Index

AQI Color	Level of Concern	Values of Index	Description of Air Quality
Green	Good	0-50	Air pollution poses little or no risk
Yellow	Moderate	51-100	Air quality is acceptable. Some may be at risk
Orange	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	101-150	Sensitive people may experience health effects. The general public is less likely to be affected
Red	Unhealthy	151-200	Some members of the general public may experience health effects: members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
Purple	Very Unhealthy	201-300	Health Alert: The risk for health effects is increased for everyone.
Maroon	Hazardous	301 and higher	Health warning of emergency conditions: everyone is more likely to be affected.