

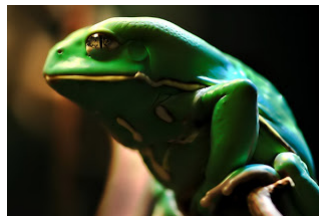
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By: Catherine Barrett, Staff Member

The most talked about drug in horse racing this summer has been “frog juice,” also known as dermorphin, which is a synthesized version of a substance secreted by the waxy monkey tree frog (*Phyllomedusa sauvagei*), a native of South America.[1] More than 30 horses in four states have tested positive for the drug, but the drug’s use may be even more widespread, because many states cannot test for dermorphin.[2]

Dermorphin is a painkiller, 40 times more powerful than morphine, which the frogs secrete to protect their sensitive skin.[3] It joins a long list of powerful painkillers that have been used in racehorses (an imaginative list which also includes cobra venom).[4] When racehorses have been given painkillers – whether the painkillers originated in reptiles, amphibians, or laboratories – the horses do not feel the pain that is supposed to be a natural warning against injury.[5] The risk that a horse will break down during a race, causing serious injury to the horse and rider, is thus increased.[6] Even a minor injury may disqualify a thoroughbred from a post-racing career if it is exacerbated by running a heavily medicated horse in one last race.[7]

Although federal law regulates other aspects of interstate racing, there are no federal laws or regulations addressing the use of race day medications like “frog juice.”[8] In May of 2011, Congressman Ed Whitfield of Kentucky and Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico introduced the “Interstate Horseracing Improvement Act of 2011” to address the use of medication in horseracing.[9] If enacted, the bill would ban the use of race day drugs, require that winning horses be tested by accredited labs, and provide stern sanctions for trainers caught violating drug rules.[10] Trainers caught in multiple drug violations would be disqualified from the sport.[11] The Interstate Horse Racing Improvement Act of 2011 has been referred to the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade.[12] No hearings have been conducted on the legislation, but as of this spring, Congressman Whitfield is still gathering support for its passage.[13] He can be contacted through his website, <http://whitfield.house.gov/> (<http://whitfield.house.gov/>).

[1] Jeanna Bryner, *What is Frog Juice?*, LIVE SCIENCE (June 20, 2012), <http://www.livescience.com/21064-frog-juice-racehorse-drugs.html> (<http://www.livescience.com/21064-frog-juice-racehorse-drugs.html>).

[2] *Id.*

[3] *Id.*

[4] Walt Bogdanich and Rebecca R. Ruiz, *Turning to Frogs for Illegal Aid in Horse Races*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (June 19, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/20/sports/horse-racing-discovers-new-drug-problem-one-linked-to-frogs.html> (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/20/sports/horse-racing-discovers-new-drug-problem-one-linked-to-frogs.html>).

[5] Whitfield, *Udall Introduce Legislation to End Doping of Racehorses*, (May 1, 2011), <http://whitfield.house.gov/press-release/whitfield-udall-introduce-legislation-end-doping-race-horses> (<http://whitfield.house.gov/press-release/whitfield-udall-introduce-legislation-end-doping-race-horses>).

[6] *Id.*

[7] Esther Marr, *Protecting Racehorses for Second Careers*, THE BLOODHORSE (June 28, 2010), <http://www.bloodhorse.com/horse-racing/articles/57661/protecting-racehorses-for-second-careers> (<http://www.bloodhorse.com/horse-racing/articles/57661/protecting-racehorses-for-second-careers>).

[8] Laura Allen, *Fact v. Fiction: Ending Race Horse Doping*, ANIMAL LAW COALITION (April 7, 2012), <http://www.animallawcoalition.com/horse-slaughter/article/1987> (<http://www.animallawcoalition.com/horse-slaughter/article/1987>).

[9] Whitfield, *Udall Introduce Legislation to End Doping of Racehorses*, (May 1, 2011), <http://whitfield.house.gov/press-release/whitfield-udall-introduce-legislation-end-doping-race-horses> (<http://whitfield.house.gov/press-release/whitfield-udall-introduce-legislation-end-doping-race-horses>).

[10] *Id.*

[11] *Id.*

[12] Bill Summary and Status, 112th Congress (2011 – 2012) H.R.1733, The Library of Congress: Thomas (last accessed June 25, 2012) <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d112:h.r.1733>: (<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d112:h.r.1733>).

[13] Ray Paulick, *Whitfield: Will Work To Pass Horseracing Improvement Act*, PAULICK REPORT (March 28, 2012) <http://www.paulickreport.com/news/ray-s-paddock/whitfield-will-work-to-pass-horseracing-improvement-act/> (<http://www.paulickreport.com/news/ray-s-paddock/whitfield-will-work-to-pass-horseracing-improvement-act/>).

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