

Greyhounds feared dead; hauler banned for life from racing

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The mystery of Tucson Greyhound Park's missing greyhounds has yet to be solved — and may never be.

Still, the Arizona Department of Racing went ahead Tuesday and revoked Colorado greyhound hauler Rick Favreau's license while also banning him for life from greyhound racing in the state.

Favreau removed more than 140 dogs from Tucson Greyhound Park between November 2005 and July 2006. Favreau and the track's managers had an agreement that, for \$150 each, he would haul the dogs to his property in Calhan, Colo. From there they would be distributed to adoption agencies.

Most of the dogs, however, disappeared, prompting Department of Racing director Geoffrey Gonsler to assume the worst.

"The assumption is that the animals may have been killed for profit," he wrote in his ruling, citing a lack of information from Favreau and Tucson Greyhound Park to prove otherwise.

The department also ordered Favreau to contribute \$140,000 to a greyhound adoption agency and serve 700 hours of community service with an animal-rights or adoption group. Collecting will be difficult, however, because the department has limited powers, particularly since Favreau is in Colorado.

Favreau has yet to pay a \$1,000 fine levied several months ago by the Phoenix Greyhound Park Board of Stewards.

Gonsler declined to comment on the ruling, citing Favreau's right to appeal it.

In his ruling, however, Gonsler characterized the disappearance as inhumane and undercutting the sport's integrity.

"The entire scenario smells of foul play and is revolting to those who love greyhounds, both as pets and as athletes, fully support humane treatment of our animal athletes, and respect the legitimacy of parimutuel racing," he wrote.

He also criticized Tucson Greyhound Park, which was not under investigation, saying it failed to meet its responsibilities to the dogs.

Gonsler noted the track entered an agreement with Favreau, but failed to keep "complete and accurate records" of the location and disposition of the dogs.

"This raises the issue" of whether Tucson Greyhound Park's "responsibility stops at the entrance to the track, or whether it extends beyond to ensure the proper care, safety and disposition of the greyhounds that are no longer active racers," he wrote.

Tucson Greyhound Park general manager Chris McConnell did not reply to a message left on his cell phone.

Favreau has disconnected his phone. He has in the past denied any wrongdoing, but has also failed to locate any of the greyhounds for investigators.

Greyhound activists reacted to the ruling with displeasure at what they perceived as the Department of Racing's limited ability to issue sanctions.

Susan Netboy, who first reported the missing greyhounds and is president of the California-based Greyhound Protection League, described the sanctions as a "mere formality."

"I take very little comfort in the fact that he has been fined or he has been dealt with because the dogs are dead," Netboy said, adding she plans to pursue the case criminally.

In the meantime, she has been compiling lists of owners for what she believes to be 177 dogs that have disappeared.

Exactly how many dogs have disappeared from Tucson Greyhound Park is unclear as various numbers have been reported in the media.

The number 140 the department has settled on represents those dogs whose disappearance could be confirmed. Gonsler said the number could be higher.

This is the second major incident involving dogs being hauled from Tucson Greyhound Park in the last year and a half.

In the summer of 2005, eight dogs died while being taken to a now-closed racetrack in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

The state's Department of Racing is working to create a greyhound database to monitor the movement of dogs to and from tracks.

Officials with the Colorado Division of Racing are also investigating the case.

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