



Rolling Meadows Animal Hospital Equine News Letter

August 2006

Horse Deaths in Texas

We have been asked several times about the recent deaths of over two dozen horses at Carousel Acres Equine Center in Brazos County, Texas. Initially the internet was buzzing with the "fact" that Purina horse feed was responsible for the deaths and recommendations were to stop feeding the feed immediately. As with much information being passed through e-mails, there was some truth and some fiction involved.

The truth is the horses did die and they were fed Purina feed. What the e-mail failed to mention was the farm over had treated the feed with a chemical to kill insects in the feed bins. The following is the complete press release from the Texas Dept of Agriculture. This should stop all the worries about "feed problems". STRATEGY and EQUINE SENIOR are the feeds we use and recommend consistently because of the excellent results.

Texas Department of Agriculture officials confirmed Friday that they're investigating what caused 27 horses to die at a Brazos County equestrian center earlier in the week.

Beverly Boyd, spokes woman for the Department of Agriculture, said the Austin-based agency is in the process of issuing an order to stop the use of a pesticide used at Carousel Acres Equine Center off Koppe Bridge Road. The department typically waits for a complaint to be filed before investigating but opted to bypass that procedure in this case, Boyd said.

"We did not wait for a complaint to become involved," she said, adding that the inquiry began Friday. "From what we've been reading and understanding, we decided we better go ahead."

Whether the pesticide was applied under the direction of a licensed individual and if the stable owner waited the correct aeration time period before using the feed treated with the chemical pesticide are questions that investigators likely will address, officials said.

Boyd said she couldn't release specifics about the investigation because it is ongoing.

Bradley Raphel, owner of the Carousel Acres, said Friday that he applied PhosFume pesticide, which releases phosphate gas to eliminate weevils, to the horses' feed late on the night of July 15, and then used that feed the next day.

Animal feeds and finished foods that have been treated with the pesticide should be aerated for 48 hours before being consumed, according to the Applicator's Manual.

Raphel said that investigators with the Department of Agriculture asked him Friday for the date and time that he dispensed the pesticide, the name of the product and where it was bought.

"There's all kinds of remedies," Raphel said, adding that the horses remaining at the center have been given new hay and feed since the incident occurred. "This is just one. It's just something that was recommended to us. Somebody had used it before and had good results and told us about it."

Raphel said he has used PhosFume, which is applied annually, for the past three or four years.

Boyd said the investigation could take two to three months. If any violations are found, administrative action, including a fine, could be taken, she said.

Two dozen horses at the facility fell ill and died overnight Sunday, while three more died after being taken to the Large Animal Clinic at Texas A&M University..

Necropsies performed on the three who died at the clinic revealed that each had phosphine gas in their stomach, said Dr. Richard Adams, the dean of A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Adams said Friday that the gas, which was released from the pesticide, was the cause of death and not a defect in the feed given to the horses.

PhosFume is a regulated pesticide, which means a license through the Department of Agriculture is required in order to apply it, Boyd said.

Raphel initially said in an interview early Friday afternoon that he was licensed to apply the pesticide. However, when pressed later, he said he was not licensed and that he applied the treatment under the supervision of his friend, Walter Cronin, whom he said is licensed.

Cronin said Friday that he does have that license. When asked if he was present July 15 when Raphel applied pesticide to the horse feed, Cronin would only say that he was not present

"every time" Raphel applied the pesticide.

"From what I've learned from the county, [Raphel] did everything proper and correct," Cronin said.

Boyd said the Department of Agriculture had no record of Raphel being licensed to dispense the pesticide. The department had closed Friday when Raphel identified Cronin as the license holder, and Boyd said there was no way to verify that he had a license after hours.

"For state-limited use or restricted use pesticides, it can either be applied by a licensed applicator or under the supervision of a licensed applicator," Boyd said. "It's my understanding that [the license holder needs] to be standing there."

Pesticide licenses are available through the department for commercial and private applicators.

A private applicator is a person who uses or supervises the use of pesticides to produce an agricultural commodity, such as animals raised for farm or ranch work, according to the department's Web site. Private applicators must go through training and pass an exam to obtain a license, Boyd said. Licenses must be renewed every five years, and 15 continuing education credits must be earned during that time, she said.

A commercial license is issued to businesses or employees that apply pesticides to the property of others for hire or compensation. It requires the applicator to pass three exams and have five continuing education credits, Boyd said.

Each of the 16 horses that were placed on a watch list Thursday was in good condition and recovering from the illness late Friday, Raphel said. Another is being released from intensive care at the Large Animal Hospital, he said.

Raphel, who has owned the stable with his wife Beverly Raphel since 1998, said he lost two-thirds of his herd at the stable, including all of his stallions, a few three-month-old foals, two mares and some of the horses he uses for lessons.

"We're taking one day at a time, trying to physically and mentally deal with this," Raphel said. "We have a long rebuilding program ahead of us."

Thanks for stopping by,

Randy