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RACING SURFACES COMMITTEE PUBLISHES SCIENTIFIC WHITE PAPER

The Racing Surfaces Committee that was formed at the inaugural Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit in 2006 has published a 34-page "Racing Surfaces White Paper" that details the current state of knowledge pertaining to training and racing surfaces.

The document, drafted as a collection of published scientific papers and data, was co-authored by Dr. Mick Peterson (University of Maine), Dr. C. Wayne McIlwraith (Colorado State University), Dr. Lars Roepstorff (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences), Dr. Jeffrey J. Thomason (University of Guelph) and Christie Mahaffey (University of Maine).

"The fundamental issue behind doing this white paper was the fact that there has been limited academic study of racetracks," Peterson said. "Veterinarians, engineers and soil scientists have all studied racing surfaces, but it has been a modest body of study. This paper will tell researchers and scientists what we don't know and confirm once again that actions taken to improve safety should be based on sound science and published research."

The white paper, according to Peterson, emphasizes that a number of factors affect the performance of a racing or training surface.

"Climate and maintenance are two examples," he said. "No one can control the weather, but the safety and performance of surfaces are highly dependent on the judgment and skill of those who have day-to-day responsibility for surface maintenance. Our goal is to provide the best possible information to the superintendents so they can make decisions based on sound test results."

Peterson and McIlwraith are the coordinators of the Racing Surfaces Testing Laboratory, which was formed in the spring of 2009 with financial support from a broad industry coalition to enhance surface safety for horses and riders.

The Racing Surfaces Testing Laboratory conducts 24 different tests at its lab and in collaboration with supporting labs. These tests have been performed for 50 different clients inside and outside of the U.S., with some of the racetracks now in their third year of a comprehensive testing program. The result is that thousands of tests have been conducted for these tracks, which allow surfaces to be compared over time and between racetracks with similar climate and design.

The white paper is available at http://www.grayson-jockeyclub.org/resources/White_Paper_final.pdf.