



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20201

JAN 25 2006

The Honorable Ed Whitfield
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Whitfield:

Thank you for your letter regarding concerns about the health and welfare of individuals working in thoroughbred and quarter horse racing. The issues addressed by the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations reflect concerns that warrant further evaluation.

In your letter, you requested the National Institute for Occupational Safety (NIOSH) to undertake a comprehensive inventory of safety hazards in the industry. You noted concerns about the following issues: weight and body fat, track conditions, safety equipment, condition of the horses, track work rules, and qualifications of jockeys and riders, among others. This list covers topics in the area of occupational health, workplace safety, and labor law.

I will direct NIOSH to investigate your concerns. This would entail assembling a team of experts in diverse fields, researching currently available information, defining the issues from a public health perspective, focusing on the highest priority problems most appropriately addressed by NIOSH, developing an approach to gathering the necessary data, and assessing the resources that likely will be needed. Further, as you request, I will instruct NIOSH to periodically brief the Committee staff on their efforts.

Thank you for bringing this issue to my attention. I appreciate your commitment to ensuring a safe and healthy work environment in the racing industry. If you or your staff would like to discuss this further, please contact Jason Broehm in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Washington Office at (202) 690-8598. I also will provide this response to Congressman Bart Stupak who co-signed your letter.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Michael O. Leavitt in black ink.
Michael O. Leavitt

cc: The Honorable Joe Barton, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable John D. Dingell, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Dr. Julie L. Gerberding, Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. John Howard, Director
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



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The Honorable Bart Stupak
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Stupak:

Thank you for your letter regarding concerns about the health and welfare of individuals working in thoroughbred and quarter horse racing. The issues addressed by the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations reflect serious concerns that warrant further evaluation.

In your letter, you requested the National Institute for Occupational Safety (NIOSH) to undertake a comprehensive inventory of safety hazards in the industry. You noted concerns about the following issues: weights and body fat, track conditions, safety equipment, condition of the horses, track work rules, and qualifications of jockeys and riders, among others. This list covers topics in the area of occupational health, workplace safety, and labor law.

I will direct NIOSH to develop a plan to respond to your concerns. This will require assembling a team of experts in diverse fields, researching currently available information, defining the issues from a public health perspective, focusing on the highest priority problems most appropriately addressed by NIOSH, developing an approach to gathering the necessary data, and assessing and obtaining the resources that likely will be needed. Further, as you request, I will instruct NIOSH to periodically brief the Committee staff on their efforts.

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