

Arizona Is Close to Banning Greyhound Racing



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Arizona, home to the oldest dog track in the U.S. and one of only six states that still have active tracks, is about to become the 40th state to ban greyhound racing.

The state's Senate Finance Committee has unanimously passed a [bill](#), sponsored by Sen. Steve Yarbrough, that would outlaw the cruel sport and end dog racing at Tucson Greyhound Park, which has been in continual operation since 1944, by the end of the year.

"I get these dogs off the track and see how abused they have been," Joe Romack, who rescues greyhounds, told the committee, according to the [Daily Courier](#). "They're in cages 20 hours a day. They sleep on scraps of urine-soaked carpet. We need to end the abuse."

[GREY2K USA Worldwide](#), the largest greyhound protection organization in the world, described similar conditions at Tucson Greyhound Park in a [2011 report](#). The facility's general manager even said he wouldn't let his own dog live in such horrible conditions.

Between January 2007 and November 2009, when the Arizona Department of Racing stopped providing injury statistics, 923 injuries were reported at the state's dog-racing tracks. Most common were broken legs, but dogs also suffered fractures, broken backs, cracked skulls and paralysis. Sixty-seven dogs died or had to be euthanized.

Fortunately, dog racing is losing popularity in Arizona and other states. From 2000 to 2010, gambling on live dog racing in Arizona dropped 75 percent.

Perhaps that's why the bill to end this sport is backed by the operators of Tucson Greyhound Park.

"There is growing pressure in the state and around the country to end live greyhound racing. We understand that, we respect that, we feel that," track lobbyist Michael Racy told the committee, the Mohave Valley Daily News [reports](#). "Dog racing in Arizona and the country is probably and realistically coming to an end."

Not surprisingly, the bill is opposed by Rory Goree, chairman of the Arizona Racing Commission.

"I know in the media you have heard a lot of lies about Tucson Greyhound Park," he told the committee. "Those dogs are not as bad off as other people that you heard earlier, or the media, claim."

The bill is also opposed by the former owners of two Phoenix-area dog-racing tracks that closed over five years ago.

"In the future, the situation might arise where we might want to reopen the racetracks. This bill does not allow us to do that," Edward Braunger, who represents the track owners, told the committee. "This essentially kills greyhound racing in the future [for] Arizona."

That's right, this bill kills greyhound racing — just like greyhound racing kills many of its competitors. In fact, Tucson Greyhound Park is [under investigation](#) after several dogs with serious illnesses and injuries were removed from the facility last month. Two of the dogs died. Last year, six dogs died.

"Greyhound racing isn't a sport — it's a cruel practice that's like one step above dog fights," Sen. Steve Farley, who supports the bill, told the committee. He said it's "perverse" that Arizona laws seem to encourage dog racing by giving track owners tax credits and exclusive rights to offer off-track betting (OTB) on televised horse races.

Because of that so-called perversion, Tucson Greyhound Park won't be closing at the end of the year. For at least two years, it will be an OTB venue. According to [Your West Valley](#), this provision was added to the bill because the current Arizona law only allows tracks that have live racing to run OTB operations.

Photo credit: [Ronnie Macdonald](#)