

# Counterfeit Equine Drugs Continue to Show at Track

“Just Say No,” the familiar rallying cry in the nation’s drug war now has a place at race tracks, show rings, and equine clinics across the country.

Despite repeated warnings from the animal health industry and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, some cost-conscious consumers continue to fool themselves and endanger the horses under their care with unapproved, bargain-priced products that masquerade as “the real thing.”

The counterfeit products may contain harmful impurities or ingredients not listed on the product’s label. What’s more, veterinarians and trainers who use them could be held liable for any harmful side effects they cause.

Most recently, in the upper Midwest, a product called Arthryl was being marketed as a new, inexpensive form of hyaluronic acid, a drug commonly used for treating lameness in race and event horses.

However, a recent assay by an independent laboratory revealed that the product contained no detectable levels of hyaluronate. There was also evidence that indicated the presence of a steroid, reports Dr. William Tew, chief technical officer for Chesapeake Biological Laboratories, Inc., Baltimore.

Arthryl is the latest development in the continuing wave of drug counterfeiting that has plagued the equine industry and endangered the health and welfare of valuable animals:

According to Dr. John Augsburg of the FDA’s Center for Veterinary Medicine, there have been reports that some enterprising distributors are obtaining short-dated or expired legal drugs and removing the expiration dating, lot numbers, and the original manufacturer/distributor name and address segments. The products are then resold at bargain prices.

Working under cover, FDA investigators continue to find evidence of drug counterfeiting,

particularly with anabolic steroids. Last year, for example, they uncovered a batch of counterfeit product labeled as Equipoise, a popular, high quality anabolic steroid marketed by Solvay Veterinary, Inc. However, no active ingredients were found in the bogus product.

We’ve put several other counterfeiters out of business since then, but the problem certainly hasn’t gone away,” reports an FDA investigator, who requested anonymity to protect the security of ongoing investigations.

Because the flow of legitimate drugs is being watched more closely, the black market has resorted to making products of its own. “There was a time when you could buy legitimate drugs at black market prices,” the FDA investigator adds. “But now the black market is manufacturing products of its own, and there’s no telling what they’re putting in those vials.”

Over the past year, the FDA has confiscated counterfeit cartons and labels, which carried actual batch numbers copied from legitimate labels printed by established manufacturers.

In 1986, the FDA discovered an equine drug called Equi-Bold, which had been sold to veterinarians and trainers as a bargain-priced anabolic steroid. The Equi-Bold label said the product contained boldenone undecylenate, the exclusive active ingredient found in Equipoise. However, a laboratory assay showed that it contained either testosterone or nandrolone decanoate.

It is estimated that unapproved drugs make up 10-15 percent of the animal drug market in the United States. But according to Dr. Tew, a laboratory assay is not always needed to determine if a drug is counterfeit.

“All you have to do is look at the price,” he says. “No one can make a quality product and sell it for such ridiculous prices. They couldn’t stay in business.”

According to Julie Stephanus, large animal business manager at Solvay Veterinary, Arthryl was being sold at less than 10 percent of the cost of established, high quality hyaluronic acids such as Equoron.

Dr. Tew, whose laboratory has examined several illicit drugs, says the problem appears to be more prevalent in equine circles than in other areas of animal health.

Why? He offers this candid, philosophical theory:

“Horse racing is an industry of hope. And in an industry of hope, there’s always someone being taken for a ride. People are always looking for a competitive edge — a magic potion that, in their minds, will put their horse one step ahead of the competition.”

Over the past two years, crackdowns by the FDA, FBI, Department of Justice and other government agencies have reduced the availability of these drugs. But ultimately, only consumers can stop the flow.

“Just say no!” Stephanus suggests. “And only buy animal drugs from authorized manufacturers.”

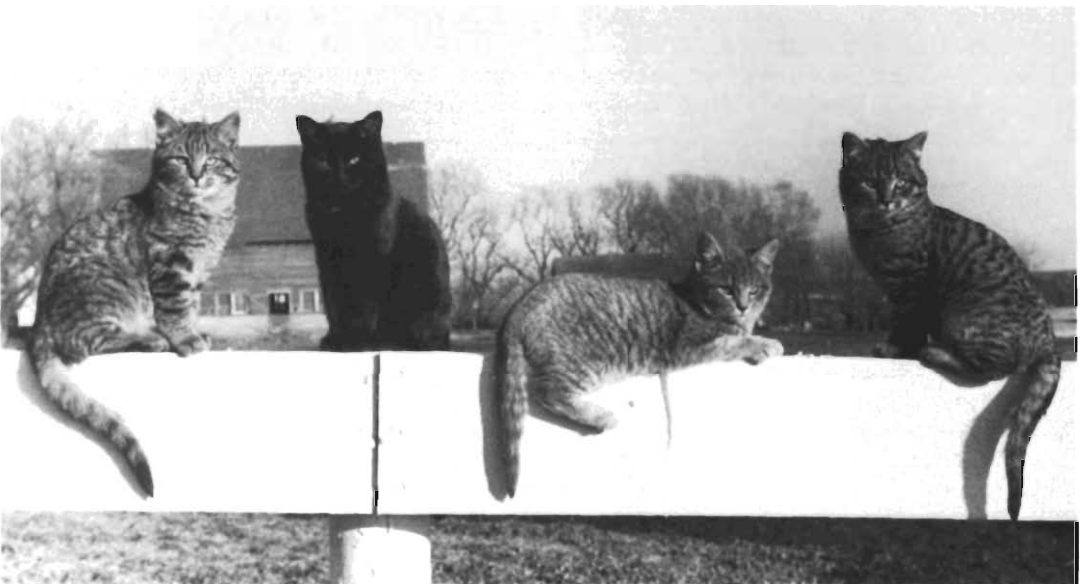
Information on illicit animal drugs or products with defaced labeling should be brought to the attention of the nearest FDA Resident Post or District Office. The telephone number is listed in most local directories. All leads will be kept confidential.

For further information contact Joe Feeks or Julie Nettifee 914-758-2200 or Julie Stephanus, Solvay Veterinary 1-800-524-1645.

## FDA Issues Warning About Defaced Drugs

The Food and Drug Administration’s Center for Veterinary Medicine warns that some animal drugs are being sold at discounted prices in Texas, Colorado, and Kansas in packaging that has been defaced. The practice may not be limited to these three states. According to the information received, some distributors are purchasing legal/approved veterinary drugs and removing the expiration dating, lot numbers, and the original manufacturer/distributor name and address segments from the labeling panels. FDA asks veterinarians to beware of these products. They may not be the bargain they appear to be. Carefully examine packages and containers to be certain they have not been tampered with or defaced. Information on products with defaced labeling should be brought to the attention of the nearest FDA Resident Post or District Office. Your cooperation is the key to stopping this illegal practice. Contact: Mary-Alice Miller, (301) 443-4557.

*Reprinted courtesy of the American Veterinary Medical Association, Public Information Division, 930 North Meacham Road, Schaumburg, Illinois 60196, (312) 885-8070.*



Louise Beyea