

# Red Hills Horse Trials

## News Release

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For Immediate Release:  
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Tallahassee, FL – Preliminary results of post mortem examinations being performed by the University of Florida College of Veterinary on two horses which died during the recent Red Hills Horse Trials competition revealed that both horses had pulmonary hemorrhage. “Despite the excellent organization of the Red Hills Horse Trials, the competent veterinary team on site, and the rapid response in both cases, nothing could be done to save these horses and there are no known methods to have prevented these rare occurrences,” the report stated.

“According to Eleanor Green, DVM, Chief of Staff, Large Animal Hospital, University of Florida, complete post mortem examinations are being performed on both horses. The owners gave permission to share information about the cause of death.

Preliminary results have indicated that DIRECT MERGER, ridden by Jonathon Hollings, died because of Pulmonary Hemorrhage, which is bleeding into the lungs. LEPRECHAUNS ROWDY BOY, ridden by Missy Miller, also had a Pulmonary Hemorrhage; in addition, and during the fall at the jump, the animal sustained a severe fracture between the third and fourth cervical vertebrae of his neck.

Fatal Pulmonary Hemorrhage is a rare condition in elite equine athletes, yet in cases of sudden death during exertion, it is at the top of the list of possible causes. The scenario is similar to sudden death from heart disorder in basketball players, in that the occurrence is very uncommon, while a heart disorder would be the most likely cause when a young, healthy athlete dies acutely during exertion. It is exceedingly rare for two horses to be affected on the same day during the same competition," the report concluded.

Dr. Mike Sigman, DVM, Veterinary Delegate of the Federation Equestre Internationale which oversees Eventing Competitions worldwide, headed the Veterinary team at the Red Hills Event. Sigman said "consideration for horse safety and response to incidents is always exceptional at Red Hills. Both incidents were handled as well as possible. Everything that could have been to aid these two horses was done. If we could have saved the animals we would have. Unfortunately no one could have helped them. When speed is involved in any sport, accidents will happen."

Thomas Barron, Board Chairman of the Red Hills organization, said, "safety of the mounts, riders and spectators is a top priority of this event every year. Our Safety Plan is reviewed and revised after each Trial. We have Emergency Medical personnel on site as well as Veterinarians. Nothing is left to chance. We require riders to wear appropriate safety gear, as do other events of this kind. But like any sport, there are always risks involved. We deeply regret the accidents which took place over the weekend."

"Since its inception," Barron continued, "the Red Hills Course has been designed by Mark Phillips, U. S. Olympic Equestrian Coach and riders planning to enter the event are provided a description of the course, terrain and course difficulty well in advance. Mark Phillips is a recognized authority in his field. His courses are designed to safely test the ability of horse and rider. There will always be situations where a horse will refuse to go over an obstacle for some reason, and this weekend was no exception, but the refusals were scattered about the course as they have been in previous years."

Darren Chiacchia, a member of the U.S. Olympic Equestrian Eventing Team was injured in a fall on the Red Hills Cross Country Course on Saturday. He is currently hospitalized at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital with head injuries, and according to family members is gradually showing improvement in his condition. Updates on Darren's condition may be found on his website: [www.eventrider.com](http://www.eventrider.com)

