



Blame Traded Over Horse's Death

By Charles Rabin and Ani Martinez, The Miami Herald

Sep. 1--There's little dispute that an electrified steel box killed a 3-year-old Paso Fino stallion named Desquite de la Rosa on Wednesday and left its rider hospitalized.

But why the box was energized and exposed along a well-worn grass path in Southwest Miami-Dade's Horse Country became a source of contention Thursday between two local agencies -- Miami-Dade's Department of Public Works and Florida's Turnpike Enterprise.

"In our view, it's not our road anymore," said turnpike spokeswoman Sonyha Rodriguez-Miller.

Countered Public Works spokeswoman Marie Bertot: "The streetlight system maintenance function was never transferred to Miami-Dade County."

While they played the blame game Thursday afternoon, horse trainer Francisco Antommarchi was released from Kendall Regional Medical Center, still nursing chest pains, headaches and ringing ears, his attorney said.

He was sent there early Wednesday evening after the horse he was riding strolled along a grass path in Horse Country near Southwest 118th Avenue and 43rd Street.

Just a few feet from a Florida Power & Light substation -- a coincidence, FPL says -- was a one-by-two-foot metal box partially hidden under some grass. Desquite stepped on it.

RIDER THROWN

The chocolate-colored stallion with champion bloodlines reared and collapsed, and Antommarchi was thrown about 10 feet, according to a witness. When Miami-Dade Fire Rescue arrived, they found the trainer wandering around and the horse dead. The area was immediately cordoned off and FPL came out and disconnected the power.

Bertot said she believes the box, which was powered by the substation, served as an electricity provider for lights on Southwest 118th Avenue.

A leather saddle and chaps likely saved Antommarchi's life, Miami-Dade Fire Spokesman Elkin Sierra said. Another fire rescue worker said there was no way to know if someone wearing rubber sole shoes would have survived stepping on the rusted steel surface, but it's unlikely anyone would have if their shoes were wet, he said.

"There were exposed wires in a box outside the substation," Sierra said.

PREVIOUS INCIDENT

The incident might have been avoided had Carlos Hernandez, another horse trainer, called the county or FPL after his horse stepped on the same rusted steel box that killed Desquite de la Rosa on Wednesday. Hernandez was tossed; his horse survived.

"I didn't feel the shock, but I know he did," said Hernandez, who called fellow riders to warn them.

The trainer said he passed word along to other riders throughout Horse Country -- a small 10-block section just west of Florida's Turnpike between Miller Drive and Bird Road -- but did not notify authorities.

Though rare, there have been some high-profile electrocutions in public places in Dade over the years. In 1991, a homeless woman named Ramona Evelyn Blackford was barefoot and crossing Biscayne Boulevard in the rain at 36th Street and got shocked to death.

It was later determined that a high-voltage cable under a storm sewer drain was pinched enough by overhead passing vehicles that it lost its insulation cover. It electrified the steel-framed paving block sewer cover Blackford stepped on.

And in 1998, 12-year-old Jorge Cabrera was electrocuted at a bus shelter on Coral Way that had been connected to a faulty lighting system. Cabrera had sneaked out of his home after fighting with his mother over homework.

Desquite is owned by Armando Villar, a horse breeder at Rancho La Rosa. Thursday afternoon, Villar and family members stood outside his Horse Country home, its terra cotta walls surrounded by a trimmed ficus hedge and a bronze iron gate.

A gray tarp covered the dead horse. The family gathered around.

CAUSE UNKNOWN

Meanwhile, no one could say this early what caused the horse's electrocution. Yet the finger-pointing continued.

Miami-Dade's Bertot said the county assumed responsibility for mowing the grass along the right-of-way on 118th Street last year, but it never took over control of the street lights. The Turnpike Enterprise still pays those light bills, she said.

FINGER-POINTING

"If the county is to assume the maintenance of the street lights in the future, public works staff would need to inspect the facilities to ascertain they meet county standards," said Bertot.

Rodriguez-Miller disagreed: "Anything on 118th Avenue is their property, according to the deed," she said.

It all meant very little to Juan Villa, a trainer and friend of Villar's. "It really could have been any of us. I would say about 80 percent of the boxes [in the area] are either uncovered or partially uncovered," he said. "You can even see the wires exposed in some of them."

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