



Illinois Department of Professional Regulation

NEWS

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Governor Gets Tough with Toughman *Illinois takes swift action to stop Toughman Fights in February*

Chicago – The Blagojevich Administration today announced new emergency rules that ban “Toughman” competitions effective immediately. Toughman competitions, in which often untrained and unconditioned fighters pummel each other, have led to at least dozen deaths across the country.

“These competitions amount to organized street fights. The participants lack training, the rules are loose – at best – and the outcomes are often seriously damaging, if not deadly,” said Fernando Grillo, Director of the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation (IDPR). “We cannot, and will not, allow Toughman fighting in Illinois.”

At least 12 people have died after participating in Toughman contests across the country, including Stacy Young, a 30-year-old mother of two from Florida who climbed into the ring at an event last year against an opponent with vastly more experience. Jodie Meyers, Young’s sister, and her husband, Donald, have become active in warning about the dangers of Toughman and joined Director Grillo in announcing the rule change.

“It has been my wish that our family tragedy not be repeated,” Donald Meyers said. “I am grateful that Gov. Blagojevich took this immediate and decisive action.”

In recent years, Toughman competitions organized by promoter Art Dore, who ran the event at which Young was killed, have been held twice a year at convention centers in Peoria and Rockford. Other smaller unsanctioned events have been staged in bars and taverns across the state by unlicensed promoters, including a recent event in Mount Vernon the Department successfully halted.

“Had we known the background of the people we were dealing with, we would have known better than to trust the safety measure promised to the participants,” Jodie Meyers said. “Promoters like Art Dore show us all we need to conclude that self-regulation does not work - it needlessly puts lives in jeopardy.”

Gov. Blagojevich, a former Golden Gloves boxer, instructed the IDPR to take quick action to prevent two recently scheduled Toughman competitions from taking place in Peoria and Rockford in February.

“From this point forward, only professional fights approved and regulated by the Department of Professional Regulation, amateur fights approved by USA Boxing and Golden Gloves, and bona fide kickboxing and martial arts tournaments will be allowed in this state,” Grillo said. “We will diligently pursue any events that fall outside the scope of these new regulations to ensure the safety of the public.”

Unauthorized fighting events pose serious health risks to those involved because they:

- Do not always require boxers to undergo a pre-fight physical;
- Do not test competitors for HIV;
- Do not prevent inebriated fighters from entering the ring;
- Offer only a few weight classes so that competitors can be 100 pounds or more apart in size;
- Pair trained and untrained fighters;
- Offer inadequate medical care and physician oversight.

Today’s rule changes will tighten definitions in the Boxing Act regarding banned fighting events, including Toughman. Previously, promoters like Dore characterized their events as “kickboxing” competitions to exploit a loophole in the Boxing Act and avoid sanctions. Legitimate kickboxing and martial arts events were, and remain, exempt from “ultimate fighting” (Toughman) restrictions.

The new regulations will require promoters and participants to abide by the same rules professional boxing does, such as using stringent class and weight measurements in pairing fighters, and mandating that unlicensed one-and two-day elimination tournaments be sanctioned by reputable organizations like the Golden Gloves of America and the U.S. Amateur Boxing Federation.

Illinois joins 14 other states in banning or severely restricting these types of competitions. Another five states are considering similar action.

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