

case file while in the performance of duty. On the reverse side of the claim form the employing establishment acknowledged that appellant was injured in the performance of duty.

By decision dated June 12, 2019, OWCP denied appellant's traumatic injury claim, finding that the evidence of record was insufficient to establish causal relationship between his diagnosed cervical and lumbar conditions and the accepted February 6, 2019 employment incident, as the medical evidence did not differentiate between the claimed injury and appellant's preexisting injury. On July 16, 2019 appellant requested reconsideration. By decision dated July 25, 2019, OWCP denied modification of its June 12, 2019 decision.

The Board notes that appellant has prior accepted OWCP claims for lumbar and cervical conditions. Under OWCP File No. xxxxxx508, OWCP accepted his claim regarding a September 3, 2004 traumatic injury for the conditions of neck sprain and strain and cervical subluxation. Additionally, under OWCP File No. xxxxxx533, it accepted appellant's claim regarding a May 31, 2012 traumatic injury for the condition of aggravation of a preexisting L3-L4 annular tear.

OWCP's procedures provide that cases should be administratively combined when correct adjudication of the issues depends on frequent cross-referencing between files.³ For example, if a new injury case is reported for an employee who previously filed an injury claim for a similar condition or the same part of the body, doubling is required.⁴ Herein, appellant has an accepted claim for neck sprain and strain and cervical subluxation, assigned OWCP File No. xxxxxxxx508, and an accepted claim for aggravation of preexisting L3-L4 annular tear, assigned OWCP File No. xxxxxx533. He subsequently filed a traumatic injury claim for the same body parts on March 11, 2019, assigned OWCP File No. xxxxxx621, which is the claim presently before the Board. The evidence pertaining to OWCP File Nos. xxxxxx508 and xxxxxx533, however, is not part of the case record presently before the Board.

For a full and fair adjudication, the case must be returned to OWCP to administratively combine the current case record with OWCP File Nos. xxxxxx508 and xxxxxx533 so it can properly determine whether appellant has established that his diagnosed cervical and lumbar conditions were causally related to the accepted February 6, 2019 employment incident. Following this and other such further development as OWCP deems necessary, it shall issue a *de novo* decision. Accordingly,

³ See Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *File Maintenance and Management*, Chapter 2.400.8(c) (February 2000).

⁴ *Id.*; *D.C.*, Docket No. 19-0100 (issued June 3, 2019); *N.M.*, Docket No. 18-0833 (issued April 18, 2019); *K.T.*, Docket No. 17-0432 (issued August 17, 2018).

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the July 25, 2019 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is set aside and the case is remanded for further proceedings consistent with this order of the Board.

Issued: April 30, 2020
Washington, DC

Alec J. Koromilas, Chief Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Patricia H. Fitzgerald, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

Valerie D. Evans-Harrell, Alternate Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board