

trailer doors while in the performance of duty. He stopped work on December 19, 2016. In a November 29, 2017 completed questionnaire, appellant explained that, at the time of the injury, he was inside a trailer moving around postal containers and cages when he felt pain between his neck and shoulders. He also indicated that the current claim was not different from the case filed under OWCP File No. xxxxxx634³ and that he was told that he had to resubmit this injury on a different form.

By decision dated January 4, 2018, OWCP denied appellant's traumatic injury claim finding that he had not established a valid medical diagnosis in connection with the accepted November 28, 2016 employment incident. Appellant subsequently requested reconsideration. By decision dated April 18, 2018, OWCP modified the January 4, 2018 decision finding that the medical evidence of record had established a diagnosis of thoracic outlet syndrome, but denied his claim because the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish that his diagnosed condition was causally related to the accepted incident. Appellant subsequently requested reconsideration and by decision dated May 31, 2019, OWCP denied modification.

The Board has duly considered the matter and concludes that this case is not in posture for decision. OWCP's procedures provide that cases should be administratively combined when correct adjudication of the issues depends on frequent cross-referencing between files.⁴ For example, if a new injury is reported for an employee who previously filed an injury claim for a similar condition or the same part of the body or when two or more separate injuries have occurred on the same date, doubling is required.⁵ Herein, appellant had a prior occupational disease claim for a bilateral finger condition and indicated that he first became aware of the condition on November 28, 2016, to which OWCP assigned OWCP File No. xxxxxx634. He then filed a traumatic injury claim for a similar condition with the same date of injury of November 28, 2016, which is the claim presently before the Board assigned OWCP File No. xxxxxx327. The case record associated with OWCP File No. xxxxxx634, however, is not presently before the Board.

For a full and fair adjudication, the Board finds that the case must be returned to OWCP to administratively combine the current case record with OWCP File No. xxxxxx634. This will allow OWCP to consider all relevant claim files and accompanying evidence in developing the current traumatic injury claim.⁶ Following this and other such further development as deemed necessary, OWCP shall issue a *de novo* decision on the merits of appellant's claim.

³ The case record reflects that appellant has a previous occupational disease claim for bilateral finger problems (Form CA-2) filed on February 24, 2017 under File No. xxxxxx634. Appellant indicated that he first became aware of the condition on November 28, 2016 and realized that it resulted from factors of his federal employment on November 30, 2016. That claim is currently in denied status.

⁴ Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *File Maintenance and Management*, Chapter 2.400.8(c) (February 2000).

⁵ *Id.*, L.H., Docket No. 18-1777 (issued July 2, 2019).

⁶ *Supra* note 4; *See P.B., Order Remanding Case*, Docket No. 19-1532 (issued April 30, 2020).

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the May 31, 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: June 15, 2020
Washington, DC

Christopher J. Godfrey, Deputy 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