

² 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq.*

ISSUES

The issues are: (1) whether appellant has met his burden of proof to establish a diagnosed medical condition in connection with the accepted March 27, 2023 employment incident; and (2) whether OWCP properly determined that appellant abandoned his request for an oral hearing.

FACTUAL HISTORY

On October 16, 2024 appellant, then a 44-year-old vehicle dispatcher clerk, filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on March 27, 2023 he fractured his back when clearing an overweight bag from the speedby while in the performance of duty. He stopped work on the date of injury, but returned the following day. Appellant stopped work again on April 10, 2023.

In an October 24, 2024 development letter, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of his claim. It advised him of the type of factual and medical evidence necessary to establish his claim and provided a questionnaire for his completion. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to respond. No response was received.

In a follow-up letter dated November 20, 2024, OWCP advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review, and the evidence remained insufficient to establish his claim. It noted that he had 60 days from the October 24, 2024 letter to submit the necessary evidence. OWCP further advised that if the necessary evidence was not received during this time, it would issue a decision based on the evidence contained in the record.

Appellant submitted a December 9, 2024 response to OWCP's October 24, 2024 development questionnaire, further describing the March 27, 2023 employment incident.

By decision dated December 23, 2024, OWCP denied appellant's traumatic injury claim, finding that the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish a medical diagnosis in connection with the accepted March 27, 2023 employment incident. It noted that no medical evidence was received in support of his claim. Consequently, OWCP found that appellant had not met the requirements to establish an injury as defined by FECA.

On January 6, 2025 appellant requested an oral hearing before a representative of OWCP's Branch of Hearings and Review.

By notice dated March 3, 2025, OWCP's hearing representative informed appellant that a telephonic hearing was scheduled for April 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST). The notice provided the toll-free number to call and appropriate passcode to access the hearing. The hearing representative mailed the notice to appellant's last known address of record. Appellant did not appear for the scheduled hearing.

By decision dated April 21, 2025, an OWCP hearing representative found that appellant had abandoned his request for an oral hearing as he had received written notification of the hearing 30 days in advance but failed to appear. The hearing representative further found that there was no indication in the case record that he had contacted the Branch of Hearings and Review either prior to or after the scheduled hearing to explain his failure to appear.

LEGAL PRECEDENT -- ISSUE 1

An employee seeking benefits under FECA³ has the burden of proof to establish the essential elements of his or her claim, including that the individual is an employee of the United States within the meaning of FECA, that the claim was timely filed within the applicable time limitation of FECA,⁴ that an injury was sustained in the performance of duty as alleged, and that any disability or medical condition for which compensation is claimed is causally related to the employment injury.⁵ These are the essential elements of each and every compensation claim, regardless of whether the claim is predicated upon a traumatic injury or an occupational disease.⁶

To determine whether a federal employee has sustained a traumatic injury in the performance of duty, it first must be determined whether fact of injury has been established. There are two components involved in establishing fact of injury. The first component is whether the employee actually experienced the employment incident at the time and place, and in the manner alleged. The second component is whether the employment incident caused an injury.⁷

The medical evidence required to establish causal relationship between a claimed specific condition and an employment incident is rationalized medical opinion evidence.⁸ The opinion of the physician must be based on a complete factual and medical background of the employee, must be one of reasonable medical certainty, and must be supported by medical rationale explaining the nature of the relationship between the diagnosed condition and the specific employment incident identified by the claimant.⁹ Neither the mere fact that a disease or condition manifests itself during a period of employment, nor the belief that the disease or condition was caused or aggravated by employment factors or incidents is sufficient to establish causal relationship.¹⁰

³ *Id.*

⁴ *F.H.*, Docket No.18-0869 (issued January 29, 2020); *J.P.*, Docket No. 19-0129 (issued April 26, 2019); *Joe D. Cameron*, 41 ECAB 153 (1989).

⁵ *L.C.*, Docket No. 19-1301 (issued January 29, 2020); *J.H.*, Docket No. 18-1637 (issued January 29, 2020); *James E. Chadden, Sr.*, 40 ECAB 312 (1988).

⁶ *P.A.*, Docket No. 18-0559 (issued January 29, 2020); *K.M.*, Docket No. 15-1660 (issued September 16, 2016); *Delores C. Ellyett*, 41 ECAB 992 (1990).

⁷ *See S.J.*, Docket No. 25-0359 (issued April 15, 2025); *T.H.*, Docket No. 19-0599 (issued January 28, 2020); *K.L.*, Docket No. 18-1029 (issued January 9, 2019); *John J. Carlone*, 41 ECAB 354 (1989).

⁸ *S.S.*, Docket No. 19-0688 (issued January 24, 2020); *A.M.*, Docket No. 18-1748 (issued April 24, 2019); *Robert G. Morris*, 48 ECAB 238 (1996).

⁹ *R.H.*, Docket No. 25-0188 (issued January 31, 2025); *A.S.*, Docket No. 19-1955 (issued April 9, 2020); *Leslie C. Moore*, 52 ECAB 132 (2000).

¹⁰ *L.W.*, Docket No. 24-0947 (issued January 31, 2025); *T.H.*, Docket No. 18-1736 (issued March 13, 2019); *Dennis M. Mascarenas*, 49 ECAB 215 (1997).

ANALYSIS -- ISSUE 1

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish a diagnosed medical condition in connection with the accepted March 27, 2023 employment incident.

Appellant failed to submit any medical evidence in support of his claim. As noted, his burden of proof includes the submission of medical evidence establishing a diagnosed condition for which compensation is claimed and that the diagnosed condition is causally related to the accepted employment factors.¹¹

As there is no evidence of record to establish a diagnosed medical condition in connection with the accepted March 27, 2023 employment incident, the Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof.

Appellant may submit new evidence or argument with a written request for reconsideration to OWCP within one year of this merit decision, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 8128(a) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 10.605 through 10.607.

LEGAL PRECEDENT -- ISSUE 2

A claimant who has received a final adverse decision by OWCP may obtain a hearing by writing to the address specified in the decision within 30 days of the date of the decision for which a hearing is sought.¹² Unless otherwise directed in writing by the claimant, OWCP's hearing representative will mail a notice of the time and place of the hearing to the claimant and any representative at least 30 days before the scheduled date.¹³ OWCP has the burden of proving that it properly mailed to a claimant and any representative of record a notice of a scheduled hearing.¹⁴

A claimant who fails to appear at a scheduled hearing may request in writing, within 10 days after the date set for the hearing, that another hearing be scheduled. Where good cause for failure to appear is shown, another hearing will be scheduled and conducted by teleconference.¹⁵

¹¹ See *A.S.*, Docket No. 25-0454 (issued April 18, 2025); *F.G.*, Docket No. 25-0306 (issued March 19, 2025); *C.M.*, Docket No. 25-0252 (issued February 21, 2025); *B.K.*, Docket No. 24-0728 (issued July 30, 2024); *E.L.*, Docket No. 24-0232 (issued April 9, 2024); *S.C.*, Docket No. 18-1242 (issued March 13, 2019); *R.H.*, 59 ECAB 382 (2008).

¹² 20 C.F.R. § 10.616(a).

¹³ *Id.* at § 10.617(b).

¹⁴ *A.R.*, Docket No. 19-1691 (issued February 24, 2020); *M.R.*, Docket No. 18-1643 (issued March 1, 2019); *Michelle R. Littlejohn*, 42 ECAB 463 (1991).

¹⁵ *Supra* note 12 at § 10.622(f).

The failure of the claimant to request another hearing within 10 days, or the failure of the claimant to appear at the second scheduled hearing without good cause shown, shall constitute abandonment of the request for a hearing.¹⁶

ANALYSIS -- ISSUE 2

The Board finds that OWCP properly determined that appellant abandoned his request for an oral hearing.

The record establishes that on March 3, 2025, in response to appellant's request for an oral hearing, a representative of OWCP's Branch of Hearings and Review properly mailed a notice of the scheduled telephonic hearing to be held on April 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., EST. The hearing notice was mailed to appellant at his last known address of record and provided instructions for his participation.¹⁷ Appellant, however, failed to call in for the scheduled hearing and did not request a postponement or provide an explanation to OWCP for his failure to attend the hearing within 10 days of the scheduled hearing. The Board, thus, finds that OWCP properly determined that appellant abandoned his request for an oral hearing.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish a diagnosed medical condition in connection with the accepted March 27, 2023 employment incident. The Board further finds that OWCP properly determined that appellant abandoned his request for an oral hearing.

¹⁶ *Id.*; *R.H.*, Docket No. 25-0188 (issued January 31, 2025); *M.C.*, Docket No. 21-0351 (issued June 29, 2021); Federal (FECA) Procedure Manual, Part 2 -- Claims, *Hearings and Reviews of the Written Record*, Chapter 2.1601.6g (September 2020); *see also A.J.*, Docket No. 18-0830 (issued January 10, 2019); *L.B.*, Docket No. 18-0533 (issued August 27, 2018).

¹⁷ Absent evidence to the contrary, a letter properly addressed and mailed in the ordinary course of business is presumed to have been received. This is called the mailbox rule. *See C.Y.*, Docket No. 18-0263 (issued September 14, 2018). Appellant did not submit evidence of nondelivery of OWCP's March 3, 2025 hearing notice such that the presumption of receipt would be rebutted.

¹⁸ *Id.*

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the December 23, 2024 and April 21, 2025 decisions of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs are affirmed.

Issued: June 17, 2025
Washington, DC

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

Patricia H. Fitzgerald, Deputy Chief Judge
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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