

**United States Department of Labor
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board**

T.G., Appellant

and

**U.S. POSTAL SERVICE, BURGAW POST
OFFICE, Burgaw, NC, Employer**

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) **Docket No. 25-0536**
) **Issued: June 20, 2025**
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Appearances:
Appellant, pro se
Office of Solicitor, for the Director

Case Submitted on the Record

DECISION AND ORDER

Before:

ALEC J. KOROMILAS, Chief Judge
PATRICIA H. FITZGERALD, Deputy Chief Judge
VALERIE D. EVANS-HARRELL, Alternate Judge

JURISDICTION

On May 9, 2025 appellant filed a timely appeal from a December 9, 2024 merit decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP). Pursuant to the Federal Employees' Compensation Act¹ (FECA) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 501.2(c) and 501.3, the Board has jurisdiction over the merits of this case.²

ISSUE

The issue is whether appellant has met her burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted factors of her federal employment.

¹ 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq.*

² The Board notes that, following the December 9, 2024 decision, appellant submitted additional evidence to OWCP. However, the Board's *Rules of Procedures* provides: "The Board's review of a case is limited to the evidence in the case record that was before OWCP at the time of its final decision. Evidence not before OWCP will not be considered by the Board for the first time on appeal." 20 C.F.R. § 501.2(c)(1). Thus, the Board is precluded from reviewing this additional evidence for the first time on appeal. *Id.*

FACTUAL HISTORY

On October 3, 2024 appellant, then a 62-year-old rural carrier, filed an occupational disease claim (Form CA-2) alleging that she developed a left arm and rotator cuff injury due to factors of her federal employment including repetitive motions of reaching, pulling, carrying, and casing large and heavy parcels of mail. She noted that she first became aware of her condition and realized its relation to her federal employment on September 27, 2024. Appellant stopped work on September 27, 2024.

In an October 8, 2024 development letter, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of her claim. It advised her as to the type of factual and medical evidence required and provided a questionnaire for her completion. OWCP afforded appellant 60 days to submit the necessary evidence.

In support of her claim, appellant submitted a September 27, 2024 report, wherein Dr. Chad Fortun, a Board-certified orthopedic surgeon, evaluated appellant due to pain in the left shoulder. He noted diagnostic examination findings from a left shoulder x-ray and diagnosed left shoulder rotator cuff syndrome. In a work restriction note of even date, Dr. Fortun provided light-duty restrictions of no lifting over 20 pounds, no repetitive reaching across the body with the left shoulder, and no repetitive overhead work.

In a follow-up letter dated November 4, 2024, OWCP advised appellant that it had conducted an interim review, and the evidence remained insufficient to establish her claim. It noted that she had 60 days from the October 8, 2024 letter to submit the necessary evidence. OWCP further advised that if the evidence was not received during this time, it would issue a decision based on the evidence contained in the record. No additional evidence was received.

By decision dated December 9, 2024, OWCP denied appellant's occupational disease claim, finding that the medical evidence of record was insufficient to establish causal relationship between the diagnosed condition and the accepted factors of her federal employment.

LEGAL PRECEDENT

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

³ *Supra* note 1.

⁴ *E.K.*, Docket No. 22-1130 (issued December 30, 2022); *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).

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 establish that an injury was sustained in the performance of duty in an occupational disease claim, an employee must submit the following: (1) a factual statement identifying employment factors alleged to have caused or contributed to the presence or occurrence of the disease or condition; (2) medical evidence establishing the presence or existence of the disease or condition for which compensation is claimed; and (3) medical evidence establishing that the diagnosed condition is causally related to the employment factors identified by the employee.⁷

Causal relationship is a medical question that requires rationalized medical opinion evidence to resolve the issue.⁸ A physician's opinion on whether there is causal relationship between the diagnosed condition and the implicated employment factor(s) must be based on a complete factual and medical background.⁹ Additionally, the physician's opinion must be expressed in terms of a reasonable degree of medical certainty, and must be supported by medical rationale explaining the nature of the relationship between the diagnosed condition and appellant's specific employment factor(s).¹⁰

ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted factors of her federal employment.

In support of her claim, appellant submitted reports dated September 27, 2024 from Dr. Fortun, who provided a diagnosis of left shoulder rotator cuff syndrome. Dr. Fortun did not, however, provide an opinion on the cause of the diagnosed medical conditions. The Board has held that medical evidence that does not offer an opinion regarding the cause of an employee's condition is of no probative value on the issue of causal relationship.¹¹ As such, this evidence is insufficient to establish appellant's claim.

⁵ *S.H.*, Docket No. 22-0391 (issued June 29, 2022); *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 *E.H.*, Docket No. 22-0401 (issued June 29, 2022); *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 *R.G.*, Docket No. 19-0233 (issued July 16, 2019); *see also Roy L. Humphrey*, 57 ECAB 238, 241 (2005); *Ruby I. Fish*, 46 ECAB 276, 279 (1994); *Victor J. Woodhams*, 41 ECAB 345 (1989).

⁸ *S.M.*, Docket No. 22-0075 (issued May 6, 2022); *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 *M.V.*, Docket No. 18-0884 (issued December 28, 2018).

¹⁰ *J.D.*, Docket No. 22-0935 (issued December 16, 2022); *T.L.*, Docket No. 18-0778 (issued January 22, 2020); *Y.S.*, Docket No. 18-0366 (issued January 22, 2020); *Victor J. Woodhams*, 41 ECAB 345, 352 (1989).

¹¹ *G.M.*, Docket No. 24-0388 (issued May 28, 2024); *C.R.*, Docket No. 23-0330 (issued July 28, 2023); *K.K.*, Docket No. 22-0270 (issued February 14, 2023); *S.J.*, Docket No. 19-0696 (issued August 23, 2019); *M.C.*, Docket No. 18-0951 (issued January 7, 2019); *L.B.*, Docket No. 18-0533 (issued August 27, 2018); *D.K.*, Docket No. 17-1549 (issued July 6, 2018).

As the medical evidence of record is insufficient to establish causal relationship between a medical condition and the accepted factors of federal employment, the Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof.¹²

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.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has not met her burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted factors of her federal employment.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT the December 9, 2024 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is affirmed.

Issued: June 20, 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

¹² *I.D.*, Docket No. 22-0848 (issued September 2, 2022); *T.G.*, Docket No. 14-751 (issued October 20, 2014).