

<sup>2</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 8101 *et seq.*

## **ISSUE**

The issue is whether appellant has met his burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted October 31, 2024 employment incident.

## **FACTUAL HISTORY**

On November 7, 2024 appellant, then a 58-year-old distribution clerk, filed a traumatic injury claim (Form CA-1) alleging that on October 31, 2024 he sustained right Achilles tendinitis when moving a pallet with a pallet jack while in the performance of duty. He stopped work on November 7, 2024

In a November 14, 2024 work note, Dr. Mark C. Yates, a Board-certified orthopedic surgeon, held appellant off work for one month due to Achilles tendinitis.

OWCP thereafter received a November 4, 2024 report from Dr. Yates, who noted that appellant reported an onset of right posterior Achilles pain a week prior as a result of moving packages while on his feet at work. Dr. Yates related that appellant had a prior repair in 2005 and a recurrence of Achilles tendinopathy in 2022. He performed a right ankle x-ray and provided examination findings. Dr. Yates provided assessments of pain in right ankle and joints of right foot and insertional Achilles tendinopathy.

In a November 26, 2024 note, Dr. Yates held appellant off work for three weeks.

In a December 3, 2024 development letter, OWCP informed appellant of the deficiencies of his claim and requested additional factual and medical evidence. It afforded appellant 60 days to respond.

In a November 26, 2024 office note, Dr. Yates provided examination findings and diagnosed insertional Achilles tendinopathy.

In a December 17, 2024 work note, Dr. Yates continued to hold appellant off work. He opined that appellant could return to work with restrictions on January 6, 2025.

In a follow-up development letter dated January 6, 2025, 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 December 3, 2024 letter to submit the requested 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 February 7, 2025, OWCP denied appellant's traumatic injury claim, finding that he had not established a diagnosed medical condition causally related to the accepted October 31, 2024 employment incident.

## **LEGAL PRECEDENT**

An employee seeking benefits under FECA has the burden of proof to establish the essential elements of his or her claim, including the fact 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 period of FECA,<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

To determine if an employee has sustained a traumatic injury in the performance of duty, OWCP begins with an analysis of whether fact of injury has been established. Fact of injury consists of two components that must be considered in conjunction with one another. The first component is whether the employee actually experienced the employment incident at the time and place, and in the manner alleged.<sup>6</sup> The second component is whether the employment incident caused an injury.<sup>7</sup>

Causal relationship is a medical question that requires rationalized medical opinion evidence to resolve the issue. The opinion of the physician must be based on a complete factual and medical background, 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See *A.D.*, Docket No. 25-0324 (issued March 26, 2025); *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).

<sup>4</sup> *J.M.*, Docket No. 17-0284 (issued February 7, 2018); *R.C.*, 59 ECAB 427 (2008); *James E. Chadden, Sr.*, 40 ECAB 312 (1988).

<sup>5</sup> *K.M.*, Docket No. 15-1660 (issued September 16, 2016); *L.M.*, Docket No. 13-1402 (issued February 7, 2014); *Delores C. Ellyett*, 41 ECAB 992 (1990).

<sup>6</sup> *B.P.*, Docket No. 16-1549 (issued January 18, 2017); *Elaine Pendleton*, 40 ECAB 1143 (1989).

<sup>7</sup> *T.H.*, Docket No. 19-0599 (issued January 28, 2020); *M.H.*, Docket No. 18-1737 (issued March 13, 2019); *John J. Carlone*, 41 ECAB 354 (1989).

<sup>8</sup> *G.S.*, Docket No. 22-0036 (issued June 29, 2022); *M.V.*, Docket No. 18-0884 (issued December 28, 2018); *I.J.*, 59 ECAB 408 (2008).

<sup>9</sup> *J.D.*, Docket No. 25-0007 (issued December 5, 2024); *S.W.*, Docket No. 24-0302 (issued July 26, 2024); *T.M.*, Docket No. 22-0220 (issued July 29, 2022); *S.S.*, Docket No. 18-1488 (issued March 11, 2019); see also *J.L.*, Docket No. 18-1804 (issued April 12, 2019).

### ANALYSIS

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted October 31, 2024 employment incident.

In support of his claim, appellant submitted a November 4, 2024 report and several work notes from Dr. Yates, wherein he noted that appellant reported an onset of right posterior Achilles pain a week prior due to moving an excessive amount of packages while on his feet. Dr. Yates also noted appellant's prior medical history regarding Achilles tendinopathy. While he referenced work factors in his report, he did not explain, with rationale, how the accepted employment incident caused or aggravated appellant's diagnosed conditions. The Board has held that a medical opinion is of limited probative value on the issue of causal relationship if it is unsupported by medical rationale.<sup>10</sup> As such, this evidence is insufficient to establish appellant's claim.

Appellant also submitted work notes dated November 26 and December 17, 2024 from Dr. Yates holding him off work. These notes, however, fail to provide an opinion on causal relationship between a diagnosed condition and the accepted employment incident. 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.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, this evidence is also insufficient to establish appellant's claim.

As the medical evidence of record is insufficient to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted October 31, 2024 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.

### CONCLUSION

The Board finds that appellant has not met his burden of proof to establish a medical condition causally related to the accepted October 31, 2024 employment incident.

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<sup>10</sup> *B.M.*, Docket No. 19-1341 (issued August 12, 2020); *L.M.*, Docket No. 13-1402 (issued February 7, 2014); *Delores C. Ellyett*, 41 ECAB 992 (1990).

<sup>11</sup> *See S.K.*, Docket No. 25-0296 (issued March 5, 2025); *id.*; *A.B.*, Docket No. 23-0937 (issued January 24, 2024); *T.L.*, Docket No. 18-0778 (issued January 22, 2020); *C.F.*, Docket No. 18-0791 (issued February 26, 2019); *Victor J. Woodhams*, 41 ECAB 345 (1989).

**ORDER**

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT** the February 7, 2025 decision of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs is affirmed.

Issued: May 21, 2025  
Washington, DC

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

Janice B. Askin, Judge  
Employees' Compensation Appeals Board

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