

[Cite as *Clark v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.*, 2004-Ohio-1830.]

IN THE COURT OF CLAIMS OF OHIO

KAREN S. CLARK	:	
Plaintiff	:	
v.	:	CASE NO. 2003-11577-AD
OHIO DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION	:	<u>MEMORANDUM DECISION</u>
Defendant	:	

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FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶1} 1) On October 14, 2003, plaintiff, Karen S. Clark, was traveling south on Interstate 75 through a roadway construction zone, when her automobile struck a large pothole causing tire and rim damage to the vehicle.

{¶2} 2) Consequently, plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$519.61 for automotive repairs resulting from the October 14, 2003 incident, plus \$25 for filing fees. Plaintiff has asserted she incurred these damages as a proximate cause of negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation (DOT), in maintaining the roadway in a construction zone on Interstate 75 in Ross County.

{¶3} 3) Defendant explained the area where plaintiff's damage occurred was located within a construction area under the control of DOT contractor, John R. Jurgensen Company ("Jurgensen"). Additionally, defendant denied liability in this matter based on the allegation that neither DOT nor Jurgensen had any knowledge of

the pothole plaintiff's vehicle struck.

{¶4} 4) On January 22, 2004, plaintiff submitted a response to defendant's investigation report. However, plaintiff did not submit any evidence to establish the length of time the pothole was on the roadway prior to her property damage incident.

{¶5} 5) Defendant asserted Jurgensen, by contractual agreement, was responsible for maintaining the roadway within the construction area. Therefore, DOT argued Jurgensen is the proper party defendant in this action. Defendant implied all duties, such as the duty to inspect, the duty to warn, the duty to maintain, and the duty to repair defects, were delegated when an independent contractor takes control over a particular section of roadway.

{¶6} 6) Furthermore, defendant again denied having any notice of the damage-causing pothole. Defendant contended plaintiff failed to introduce evidence proving any requisite notice.

#### CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶7} 1) The duty of DOT to maintain the roadway in a safe drivable condition is not delegable to an independent contractor involved in roadway construction. DOT may bear liability for the negligent acts of an independent contractor charged with roadway construction. See *Cowell v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.* (2004), 2003-09343-AD.

{¶8} 2) Defendant has the duty to maintain its highway in a reasonably safe condition for the motoring public. *Knickel v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.* (1976), 49 Ohio App. 2d 335. However, defendant is not an insurer of the safety of its highways. See *Kniskern v. Somerford Twp.* (1996), 112 Ohio App. 3d 189; *Rhodus v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.* (1990), 67 Ohio App. 3d 723.

{¶9} 3) In order to recover in any suit involving injury proximately caused by roadway conditions plaintiff must prove either: 1) defendant had actual or constructive notice of the pothole and failed to respond in a reasonable time or responded in

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a negligent manner, or 2) that defendant, in a general sense, maintains its highways negligently. *Denis v. Dept. of Transp.* (1976), 75-0287-AD.

{¶10} 4) Defendant is only liable for roadway conditions of which it has notice, but fails to reasonably correct. *Bussard v. Dept. of Transp.* (1986), 31 Ohio Misc. 2d 1.

{¶11} 5) Plaintiff has not produced any evidence to indicate the length of time the pothole was present on the roadway prior to the incident forming the basis of this claim. No evidence has been submitted to show defendant had actual notice of the pothole. Additionally, the trier of fact is precluded from making an inference of defendant's constructive notice, unless evidence is presented in respect to the time the pothole appeared on the roadway. *Spires v. Hwy. Dept.* (1988), 61 Ohio Misc. 2d 262. There is no indication defendant had constructive notice of the pothole. Plaintiff has not produced any evidence to infer defendant, in a general sense, maintains its highways negligently or that defendant's acts caused the defective condition. *Herlihy v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.* (1999), 99-07011-AD. Therefore, defendant is not liable for any damage plaintiff may have suffered from the pothole.

{¶12} 6) Plaintiff has not shown, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant failed to discharge a duty owed to plaintiff, or that plaintiff's injury was proximately caused by defendant's negligence. Plaintiff failed to show that the damage-causing pothole was connected to any conduct under the control of

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defendant, that defendant was negligent in maintaining the construction area, or that there was any negligence on the part of defendant or its agents. *Taylor v. Transp. Dept.* (1998), 97-10898-AD; *Weininger v. Dept. of Transp.* (1999), 99-10909-AD; *Witherell v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.* (2000), 2000-04758-AD. Consequently, plaintiff's claim is denied.

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a. IN THE COURT OF CLAIMS OF OHIO

KAREN S. CLARK

:

Plaintiff

:

:

CASE NO. 2003-11577-AD

OHIO DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION :  
ADMINISTRATIVE

ENTRY OF

DETERMINATION

Defendant

:

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Having considered all the evidence in the claim file and, for the reasons set forth in the memorandum decision filed concurrently herewith, judgment is rendered in favor of defendant. Court costs are assessed against plaintiff. The clerk shall serve upon all parties notice of this judgment and its date of entry upon the journal.

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DANIEL R. BORCHERT  
Deputy Clerk

Entry cc:

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For Defendant

Sent to S.C. reporter 4/9/04