

[Cite as *Hackworth v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.*, 2005-Ohio-3070.]

IN THE COURT OF CLAIMS OF OHIO

PAUL W. HACKWORTH	:	
Plaintiff	:	
v.	:	CASE NO. 2005-01773-AD
DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION	:	<u>MEMORANDUM DECISION</u>
Defendant	:	

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FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶ 1} 1) On January 7, 2005, plaintiff, Paul W. Hackworth, was traveling north on U.S. Route 40 at milepost 7.49 in Madison County, when his automobile struck a pothole causing damage to the vehicle.

{¶ 2} 2) Plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$621.82, the cost of automotive repair which plaintiff contends he incurred as a result of negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation, in maintaining the roadway. Plaintiff submitted the \$25.00 filing fee.

{¶ 3} 3) Defendant has denied liability based on the fact it had no knowledge of the pothole prior to plaintiff's property damage occurrence.

{¶ 4} 4) Plaintiff did not provide sufficient evidence to indicate the length of time the pothole existed prior to the incident forming the basis of this claim.

{¶ 5} 5) Defendant has asserted maintenance records show four pothole patching operations were needed in the general vicinity of plaintiff's incident during the two-month period preceding the

January 7, 2005, property damage event.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶ 6} 1) Defendant must exercise due care and diligence in the proper maintenance and repair of highways. *Hennessey v. State of Ohio Highway Department* (1985), 85-02071-AD. Breach of this duty, however, does not necessarily result in liability. Defendant is only liable when plaintiff proves, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant's negligence is the proximate cause of plaintiff's damages. *Strother v. Hutchinson* (1981), 67 Ohio St. 2d 282, 285.

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

{¶ 8} 3) In order to prove a breach of duty to maintain the highways, plaintiff must prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant had actual or constructive notice of the precise condition or defect alleged to have caused the accident. *McClellan v. ODOT* (1986), 34 Ohio App. 3d 247. 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. 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 defective condition developed. *Spires v. Highway Department* (1988), 61 Ohio Misc. 2d 262.

{¶ 9} 4) In order for there to be constructive notice, plaintiff must show sufficient time has elapsed after the dangerous condition appears, so that under the circumstances, defendant should have

acquired knowledge of its existence. *Guiher v. Jackson* (1978), 78-0126-AD. Size of the defect is insufficient to show notice or duration of existence. *O'Neil v. Department of Transportation* (1988), 61 Ohio Misc. 2d 297. "A finding of constructive notice is a determination the court must make on the facts of each case not simply by applying a pre-set-time standard for the discovery of certain road hazards." *Bussard*, supra at 4. "Obviously, the requisite length of time sufficient to constitute constructive notice varies with each specific situation." *Danko v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.*, Court of Claims No. 90-05881, 2001-Ohio-153, affirmed (Feb. 4, 1993), Franklin App. No. 92AP-1183.

{¶ 10} 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. Highway Department* (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 Department of Transportation* (1999), 99-07011-AD. Therefore, defendant is not liable for any damage plaintiff may have suffered from the pothole.

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PAUL W. HACKWORTH :
Plaintiff :
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DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION : ENTRY OF ADMINISTRATIVE
Defendant : DETERMINATION

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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.

DANIEL R. BORCHERT
Deputy Clerk

Entry cc:

Paul W. Hackworth
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Plaintiff, Pro se

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For Defendant

RDK/laa
4/26
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