

[Cite as *Fine v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.*, 2006-Ohio-7222.]

IN THE COURT OF CLAIMS OF OHIO

JOHN P. FINE	:	
Plaintiff	:	
v.	:	CASE NO. 2006-03273-AD
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION	:	<u>MEMORANDUM DECISION</u>
Defendant	:	

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FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶ 1} 1) On November 11, 2005, Donna Fine was driving a 2005 Dodge Grand Caravan on Interstate 70 exiting at US Route 42 through a construction zone, when the vehicle struck a pothole in the traveled portion of the roadway. The pothole caused tire and rim damage to the Dodge Grand Caravan which is owned by plaintiff, John P. Fine, the spouse of Donna Fine.

{¶ 2} 2) Plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$819.80, for vehicle repairs resulting from striking the pothole in the traveled portion of the roadway. Plaintiff has asserted he incurred these damages as a proximate cause of negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation ("DOT"), in maintaining the roadway near a construction zone on Interstate 70 in Madison County. The filing fee was paid and plaintiff requested reimbursement of that amount.

{¶ 3} 3) Defendant explained the area where plaintiff's damage occurred was located within a construction zone under the control of DOT contractor, Kokosing Construction Company, Inc. ("Kokosing"). Additionally, defendant denied liability in this

matter based on the allegation that neither DOT nor Kokosing had any knowledge of the pothole plaintiff's vehicle struck. Defendant submitted evidence showing Kokosing repairs roadway defects as soon as notice of the defect is received. The particular pothole was promptly repaired after notice of the roadway condition was received.

{¶ 4} 4) Despite filing a response, plaintiff did not submit any evidence to establish the length of time the pothole was on the roadway prior to the November 11, 2005, property damage event. Plaintiff suggested the damage-causing roadway defect was, "man made by Kokosing." The "Diary Remarks" for the construction activities do not indicate Kokosing created a roadway defect on Interstate 70 at US Route 42 on or before November 15, 2005, although work was performed in the area on November 13, 2005.

{¶ 5} 5) Defendant asserted Kokosing, by contractual agreement, was responsible for maintaining the roadway within the construction area. Therefore, DOT argued Kokosing 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. The claim is devoid of evidence concerning actual or constructive notice of the particular pothole by DOT personnel

or DOT contractors prior to November 15, 2005.

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 Department of Transportation* (2004), 2003-09343-AD, jud., 2004-Ohio-151.

{¶ 8} 2) Defendant has the duty to maintain its highway 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.

{¶ 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 a negligent manner, or 2) that defendant, in a general sense, maintains its highways negligently. *Denis v. Department of Transportation* (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. 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.

{¶ 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 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. Transportation Dept.* (1998), 97-10898-AD; *Weininger v. Department of Transportation* (1999), 99-10909-AD; *Witherell v. Ohio Dept. of Transportation* (2000), 2000-04758-AD. Consequently, plaintiff's claim is denied.

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OHIO DEPARTMENT OF : ENTRY OF ADMINISTRATIVE
TRANSPORTATION : 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.

DANIEL R. BORCHERT
Deputy Clerk

Entry cc:

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Plaintiff, Pro se

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For Defendant

RDK/laa

6/15

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