NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

REVIEW BOARD

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

vs.

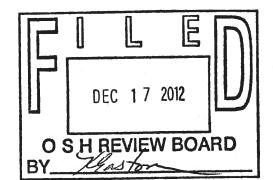
BERGELECTRIC CORP.,

OF THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND

HEALTH ADMINISTRATION, DIVISION OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND

INDUSTRY,

Docket No. LV 13-1617



Complainant,

Respondent.

DECISION

This matter having come before the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD at a hearing commenced on the 14th day of November, 2012, in furtherance of notice duly provided according to law, MR. MICHAEL TANCHEK, ESQ., counsel appearing on behalf of the Complainant, Chief Administrative Officer of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Division of Industrial Relations (OSHA); and MR. ROBERT PETERSON, ESQ., appearing on behalf of Respondent, BERGELECTRIC CORP; the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD finds as follows:

Jurisdiction in this matter has been conferred in accordance with Nevada Revised Statute 618.315.

The complaint filed by the OSHA sets forth allegations of violation of Nevada Revised Statutes as referenced in Exhibit "A", attached thereto. The alleged serious violations in Citation 1, Items 1a through 1c reference, respectively, 29 CFR 1926.501(b)(4), 29 CFR 1926.501(c)(1) and 29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(16). The complaint further sets forth a

regulatory violation at Citation 2, Item 1, NRS 618.376(1).

At Citation 1, Item 1a, the employer was charged with exposure of employees to serious injury from a potential fall through an unguarded hole cut in a roof deck. An extension ladder was positioned through the hole for access to a decked roof level. The alleged violation was classified as "Serious" and a grouped penalty proposed in the amount of TWO THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY FIVE DOLLARS (\$2,275.00).

Citation 1, Item 1b, referenced 29 CFR 1926.501(c)(1). The employer was charged with exposing employees to a serious injury from rolling or falling objects. A 30x36 inch hole cut for access to a roof deck level was not protected by use of toeboards, screens, guardrails, or other preventative measures. Employees utilizing an extension ladder or working below were exposed to injury from possible rolling or falling objects. The violation was classified as "Serious" and a zero penalty proposed based upon the grouped penalty at Item 1a.

Citation 1, Item 1c, referenced 29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(16). The employer was charged with exposing employees to a fall hazard of approximately 3.5 feet above the ground level from a damaged rung on an extension ladder. The violation was classified as "Serious" with no penalty proposed based upon the grouped penalty assessed at Item 1a.

Citation 2, Item 1, referenced NRS 618.376(1). The employer was charged with failure to sign one of the documents submitted for review during the comprehensive inspection. The violation was classified as "Regulatory" and a zero penalty proposed based upon the grouped penalty at Citation 1, Item 1a.

Complainant and respondent counsel stipulated to the admission in evidence of complainant's Exhibits 1, 2, 3 and 4. Counsel for the complainant introduced testimony and evidence from Certified Safety and

Health Officer (CSHO) Virginia Wicklund.

Ms. Wicklund identified the complainant evidence package at Exhibits 1, 2, 3 and 4, and made reference to her narrative and investigative reports at Exhibit 1. Ms. Wicklund testified that she conducted a comprehensive worksite inspection on May 9, 2012. The comprehensive inspection resulted in citations issued to the general contractor M & H Enterprises, dba Martin Harris Construction, and two subcontractors including respondent. The respondent here, Bergelectric Corp., was an electrical subcontractor on the same project and cited for exposing its employees to similar hazardous conditions as those found in the M & H Enterprises case previously heard by this review board.

At Citation 1, Item 1a, CSHO Wicklund testified she observed an unprotected opening or hole in the roof structure exposing employees to a potential fall hazard. She determined respondent employees were directly exposed to the observed hazardous conditions based upon her interviews with respondent employees Mr. Aaron Barnum, the respondent foreman, and Mr. Brandon Koss as reported at Exhibit 1. She testified in support of her serious classification of the violation by describing the kind of injuries that would occur from a fall through the roof hole opening or off of the extension ladder utilized to access same. She determined the height of a potential fall by counting the ladder rungs, which are standard in nature, and similarly counted the cinder blocks in the wall behind the ladder, which are also of an industry recognized In response to questioning as to why the marking cones and tape noted in photographic Exhibit 2 were not adequate to "protect the hole" and avoid a citation, she testified the standard requires specific protection, which includes a guardrail system or other recognized fall arrest equipment, therefore the existing efforts were not sufficient to

satisfy the standard. Ms. Wicklund further testified the general contractor and two subcontractors were cited for employee exposure based upon the project constituting a multi-employer worksite as defined under recognized occupational safety and health law. She found that the hole penetrations were made by the general contractor who created and controlled the hazardous condition; however respondent employees on the common worksite were also exposed to the hazards. Ms. Wicklund explained the penalty calculations as made in accordance with the operations manual and included consideration at pages 8 and 9 of her narrative report at Exhibit 1 of the severity ratings which constituted a major basis for classifying the violation as serious. She testified the probability calculations were rated at "Lesser" because of the respondent's good history, effective safety program and "quick fix".

On cross-examination CSHO Wicklund confirmed the hole penetration and placement of the ladder in the opening were all effectuated by the general contractor, not the respondent subcontractor. She testified that on the day of her inspection she found three violations and proposed classification of Item 1a as Serious but the remaining violations (1(b) and 1(c)) at Citation 1 as "Other than Serious". She explained that her district manager made the final decision to also classify Items 1b and 1c as Serious and group the penalties.

At Citation 1, Item 1b, Ms. Wicklund testified there was no protection of the hole penetration to keep items from rolling or being kicked through the opening thereby potentially falling onto employees on or at the bottom of the ladder. She determined the general contractor had a strict policy requiring all employees on the project site to wear hard hats. CSHO Wicklund testified respondent's employees were wearing hard hats at the time of her inspection. She explained her

initial determination that while employees were technically exposed to being struck by items potentially falling through the hole during use up and down the ladder, the area around the hole was free of debris and the employees were wearing hard hats thereby minimizing exposure to injuries.

On cross-examination Ms. Wicklund testified that she saw no respondent employees on the ladder or with access to same on the day of her inspection but determined exposure based upon her interviews with the two employees who admitted actual use of the ladder, a description of their work effort, and the date on which the general contractor cut the opening in the hole and placed the ladder. Respondent's employees were working on the date after the hole penetration work was completed and exposed to the observed hazardous condition thereafter. She further testified that the marking cones and tape barricade might have served as a warning to employees but the standard is specific on how to protect employees on the subject site and therefore issued her findings of violation accordingly.

CSHO Wicklund identified photographic exhibits at Exhibit 2, number 2, to demonstrate a lack of any employee serious exposure to falling or rolling objects because there were no tools or debris in the area, except for a piece of iron, and not close to the opening.

At Citation 1, Item 1c, CSHO Wicklund cited the employer due to employee use of a damaged ladder and lack of compliance for dealing with the equipment as required by the standard. She testified that ladders need to be marked as damaged and promptly removed from the job site to satisfy the standard. She testified the observed ladder was damaged as depicted in Exhibit 2, photograph 2, owned and placed by the general contractor, Martin Harris, and used by the respondent and other

subcontractor employees. The respondent employees were exposed to the hazard. She described the types of injuries to be encountered if an employee stepped on the damaged rung which failed. Ms. Wicklund initially determined the injury exposure level to be minimal because the damaged ladder rung was located very low to the floor indicating a lack of probability for any reasonable potential of serious injury.

Ms. Wicklund testified from Exhibit 3, identifying the statements taken from respondent employees Barnum and Koss. At page 2 of Exhibit 3 Ms. Wicklund reported the ladder was utilized by Mr. Barnum between April 24th and May 9th. She further testified from the reported questions answered by Mr. Barnum that he utilized the ladder "probably two or three times". He informed her in response to questions in the statement that he noticed the damaged rung on the ladder but did not inform anyone. Similarly at Exhibit 3 respondent employee Koss informed CSHO Wicklund that he utilized the ladder ". . . perhaps four or five times over a period of one and one-half to two hours . . ." Mr. Koss also stated that he noticed the damaged rung but did not say anything to anyone.

At Citation 2, Item 1, Ms. Wicklund cited the respondent for failure to furnish a signed document during the inspection as required under the regulatory section of Nevada Revised Statutes. She testified the document must be signed by the employer and employee. She referenced the form document at Exhibit 4 to support her basis for the violation and classification as a regulatory violation. Ms. Wicklund further testified that the employer promptly corrected the problem after the issue was raised.

The complainant concluded and submitted its case. The respondent rested without offering any evidence or testimony. Both counsel

presented closing argument.

Complaint argued that the statutory burden of proof had been met based upon the unrebutted testimony of CSHO Wicklund and documentary evidence admitted in the record. The roof hole opening was not protected as required by the cited standard and there was no evidence offered to rebut the testimony establishing the existence of a violative condition at Item 1a. There was no recognized fall arrest system in use as required under the standard.

Counsel further argued that objects could fall or roll into and through the hole onto employees working on or below the ladder as subject of CSHO testimony which met the burden of proof at Citation 1, Item 1b. Counsel admitted the area was clean and the employees were wearing hard hats but argued that merely affected the probability factor and did not negate the potential of serious injury due to the unprotected hazardous conditions. Counsel argued the entire purpose of the standard is to ". . . protect employees from potential hazardous conditions even if there is a low probability". Counsel asserted the standard applies to the facts based upon the evidence and testimony. He further referenced CSHO testimony and Exhibit 3 to prove exposure of at least two respondent employees who admitted using the damaged ladder. He further argued employer knowledge was in evidence and imputed to the employer under recognized occupational safety and health law based upon the foreman, Mr. Barnum, having utilized the ladder as admitted to CSHO Wicklund at Exhibit 3.

At Citation 1, Item 1c, counsel referred to the photographic evidence at Exhibit 2 demonstrating the damaged ladder; and employee statements at Exhibit 3, showing that two employees of respondent observed the broken step/rung but informed no one of the condition.

Counsel further argued that regardless of what the general contractor did, or to what extent it was cited, the respondent had a duty as an employer of employees at a multi-employer worksite to protect its own employees from exposure created by others, but failed to do so.

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Counsel concluded with reference to Citation 2, Item 1, arguing that the evidence at Exhibit 4, together with the testimony of CSHO Wicklund, proved the violation and appropriateness of the classification under the regulatory section of Nevada Revised Statutes.

Respondent presented closing argument. Counsel asserted the case depicts an overreaction by OSHA in issuing and classifying the citations as serious and then grouping the penalties under the guise of fairness to the employer. He argued the three alleged violations charged in Citation 1 were clearly not within the statutory definition to satisfy a serious classification and supported by the opinion of CSHO Wicklund who reported her findings to the supervisor. Counsel argued that contractors cannot bid jobs with many companies when they have extensive serious violations confirmed; and OSHA should not "over cite" respondents when they know there is insufficient supportive evidence under any reasonable application of the law. He argued that general contractor M & H cut the hole, placed the ladder in the opening, put up the marking cones and cautionary tape, and created the hazardous conditions; then told the respondent subcontractor to ". . . go up to the roof and do your job . . . ". Counsel asserted the subcontractor respondent is now faced with three serious violations despite having an excellent history and a first rate safety program. Counsel identified various defenses to the exposure element but focused on the lack of proof for classification of the violations as serious and argued there was no evidence presented, either through testimony or documentation,

to satisfy the burden of proof to establish same. He argued that general contractor M & H put up the barrier cones as demonstrated in the photograph at Exhibit 2, so while there might be exposure to the potential for a fall, the hole was protected through the barricades, the tapes and the cones by warning well trained employees and should satisfy the standard. He argued the violations may ". . look like technical violations but that's not enough to satisfy the burden of proof . . . and there needs to be a reasonable interpretation of the standards . . ." and finding that the employees were all warned and therefore protected under an alternate means to sufficiently safeguard themselves.

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The board in reviewing the facts, documents and testimony in evidence must measure same against the established law developed under the Occupational Safety & Health Act, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS).

In all proceedings commenced by the filing of a notice of contest, the burden of proof rests with the Administrator. N.A.C. 618.788(1).

All facts forming the basis of a complaint must be proved by a preponderance of the evidence. <u>Armor Elevator Co.</u>, 1 OSHC 1409, 1973-1974 OSHD ¶16,958 (1973).

To prove a violation of a standard, the Secretary must establish (1) the **applicability** of standard, (2) the existence of noncomplying conditions, (3) employee exposure or access, and (4) that the **employer knew** or with the exercise of reasonable diligence could have known of the violative condition. See <u>Belger Cartage Service</u>, <u>Inc.</u>, 79 OSAHRC 16/B4, 7 BNA OSHC 1233, 1235, 1979 CCH OSHD \$\(23,400, \text{ p.28,373} \text{ (No. 76-1948, 1979)} \); Harvey Workover, Inc., 79 OSAHRC 72/D5, 7 BNA OSHC 1687, 1688-90, 1979 CCH OSHD 23,830, pp. 28,908-10 (No. 76-1408, 1979); American Wrecking Corp. v. <u>Secretary of Labor</u>, 351 F.3d 1254, 1261 (D.C. Cir. 2003).

A respondent may rebut allegations by showing:

1. The standard was inapplicable to the situation at issue;

2. The situation was in compliance; or lack of access to a hazard. See <u>Anning-Johnson Co.</u>, 4 OSHC 1193, 1975-1976 OSHD ¶ 20,690 (1976).

A "serious" violation is established upon a preponderance of evidence in accordance with NRS 618.625(2) which provides in pertinent part:

employment if there is a substantial probability that death or serious physical harm could result from a condition which exists or from one or more practices, means, methods, operations or processes which have been adopted or are in use at that place of employment unless the employer did not and could not, with the exercise of reasonable diligence, know the presence of the violation. (emphasis added)

The board finds the testimonial and documentary evidence presented by and through CSHO Wicklund credible, unrebutted and established violations at Citation 1, Items 1a, 1b and 1c as well as Citation 2, Item 1. The testimony was corroborated by the photographs at Exhibit 2, employee statements at Exhibit 3 and the documentation at Exhibit 4. However, notwithstanding the establishment of violative conditions in satisfaction of the burden of proof by complainant at Citation 1, Items 1a, 1b and 1c, the board finds insufficient evidence to prove the classifications of serious.

The respondent here was a subcontractor on a multi-employer worksite. The general contractor was responsible for overall safety on the project. The general contractor cut the hole penetration in the roof structure and placed a ladder there to provide access for its own employees and those of other subcontractors. The respondent neither created nor controlled the hazardous conditions, although its employees were in fact exposed to the hazards cited at Citation 1, Item 1a, 1b and 1c. Respondent employees admitted use of the defective ladder,

exercised their work efforts on the ladder or below the hole opening subjecting themselves to potential harm from falling or rolling debris, and performed other work efforts on the roof structure near the hole opening without wearing personal fall arrest systems or using other proscribed protective equipment.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the respondent employees were wearing hard hats which could protect them from falling or rolling debris, utilized the ladder but with the damaged rung near the bottom very close to the floor, and given reasonable warning of a dangerous condition through the cones, tape and barricade erected by the general contractor around the hole opening at the roof level. The CSHO found the respondent employees adequately trained in the job safety. Despite exposure to hazardous conditions, the potential and probability for serious injury or harm was substantially mitigated by the foregoing conditions, including but not limited to a) wearing of hard hats, b) use of a ladder with a damaged rung but very close to the floor, and c) a tape warning line and cone barricade at the hole site.

The board finds there is insufficient evidence to establish a substantial probability for serious injury or harm from falling or rolling objects, or slipping from the lower rung of the ladder from the damaged rung near the bottom. The board further finds that exposure from the lack of wearing personal fall arrest systems or other strict compliance with the standard was mitigated by the barricades and warning tape such to constitute an adequate means of compliance to safeguard the employees from exposure to potential serious injury from a fall through the opening in the roof structure.

Further, based upon CSHO Wicklund's narrative report at Exhibit 1, page 8, information received during her inspection was evidence of some

degree of compliance infeasibility. Drilling holes in the roof structure to erect a recognized safe barricade and/or only an ineffective alternative for a barricade utilizing sandbags, were not realistic options for an electrical subcontractor. The cones and tape demonstrated a reasonable protective level for a subcontractor to protect employees who were well trained under a company safety program. There was evidence of infeasibility due to a lack of realistic authority for a subcontractor to otherwise effectuate its work effort.

The board further finds that the respondent was neither the creating or controlling employer at the job site. While exposure was established, there was evidence of mitigation through the respondent safety program, warning tapes and barricades in place, and hard hats worn by the respondent employees. Further, there was evidence to support the recognized defense of infeasibility. The respondent employer, an electrical subcontractor, was without control or authority to drill holes in the roof structure to erect effective barricades to protect its employees. While the employer cannot be completely excused from requiring its employees to wear proscribed personal protective fall arrest systems, there was evidence of reasonable employee protection through alternate means of compliance. The board finds insufficient evidence of a substantial probability for serious injury or harm to occur under the conditions and facts subject of evidence and testimony.

A citation will be vacated if the cited employer on a multi-employer worksite:

- 1. Did not create or control the allegedly violative condition (such that it could not realistically correct the condition); and
- 2. Either:

a. Took reasonable alternative protective measures; . . .

This defense has been accepted by several court's of appeals.

Dun-Par Engineered Form Co. V. Marshall, 676 F.2d 1333, 10 OSH Cases 1561 (10th Cir. 1982); Electric Smith Inc. v. Secretary of Labor, 666 F.2d 1267, 10 OSH Cases 1329 (9th Cir. 1982); DeTrae Enters. Inc. v. Secretary of Labor, 645 F.2d 103, 9 OSH Cases 1425 (2d Cir. 1980); Bratton Corp. v. OSHRC, 590 F.2d 273, 7 OSH Cases 1004 (8th Cir. 1979). Rabinowitz, Occupational Safety and Health Law, 2008, 2nd Ed., page 151, citing cases.

A citation may be vacated if the employer proves that: (1) the means of compliance proscribed in the applicable standard would have been infeasible under the circumstances in that either (a) its implementation would have been technologically or economically infeasible or (b) necessary work operations would have been technologically or economically infeasible after its implementation; and (2) either (a) an alternative method of protection was used or (b) there was no feasible alternative mans of protection. (Emphasis added)

Beaver Plant Operations Inc., OSH Cases 18 1972, 1977 (Rev. Comm'n 1999), rev'd on another ground, 223 F.3d 25, 19 OSH Cases 1053 (1st Cir. 2000); Gregory Cook Inc., 17 OSH Cases 1189, 1190 (Rev. Comm'n 1995); Seibel Modern Mfg. & Welding Corp., 15 OSH Cases 1218, 1228 (1991); Mosser Constr. Co., 15 OSH Cases 1949 (1986), rev'd on another ground, 843 F.2d 1135, 13 OSH Cases 1652 (8th Cir. 1988). Rabinowitz, Occupational Safety and Health Law, 2008, 2nd Ed., page 151, citing cases.

The board follows well established case law emanating from the Federal courts and OSHRC which vests in the Commission (board) authority to revise classifications based upon the evidence.

"The Commission . . . may reduce or eliminate a penalty by changing the citation classification or by amending the citation . . ." . See Reich v. OSCRC (Erie Coke Corp.), 998 F.2d 134, 16 OSH Cases 1241 (3d Cir. 1993) (emphasis added)

The board concludes, as a matter of fact and law, that complainant met the statutory burden of proof and established violative conditions at Citation 1, but failed to provide sufficient proof to support classification of the violations as "Serious". The facts in evidence

do not demonstrate a "substantial probability" that serious injury or harm could reasonably result from the working conditions and/or operations subject of the cited conditions based upon evidence of mitigating factors including alternate protective measures in place. And infeasibility of realistic options for a subcontractor. However the board finds substantial evidence for reclassification of the violations at Citation 1 to "other than serious".

Where the Secretary alleges but fails to prove the seriousness of a violation, a non-serious violation generally will be found. *A.R.A. Mfg.*, 11 OSH Cases 1861, 1863-64 (Rev. Comm'n 1984). Rabinowitz, Occupational Safety and Health Law, 2008, 2nd Ed., page 225, citing cases.

The board finds that complainant met the burden of proof as to Citation 2, Item 1 classified as a regulatory violation.

It is the decision of the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD that violations of Nevada Revised Statutes did occur as to Citation 1, Item 1a, 29 CFR 1926.501(b)(4), Citation 1, Item 1b, 29 CFR 1926.501(c)(1) and Citation 1, Item 1c, 29 CFR 1926.1053(b)(16). The violations are reclassified as "Other than Serious" and the proposed penalties in the amount of TWO THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY FIVE DOLLARS (\$2,275.00) are confirmed and approved.

It is the further decision of the **NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD** that a violation of Nevada Revised Statutes did occur as to Citation 2, Item 1, NRS 618.376(1), and the Regulatory violation is confirmed together with a zero penalty.

The Board directs counsel for the complainant, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE
OFFICER OF THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION, DIVISION
OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, to submit proposed Findings of Fact and
Conclusions of Law to the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW

BOARD and serve copies on opposing counsel within twenty (20) days from date of decision. After five (5) days time for filing any objection, the final Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law shall be submitted to the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD by prevailing counsel. Service of the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law signed by the Chairman of the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD shall constitute the Final Order of the BOARD.

DATED: This 17th day of December, 2012.

NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD

By /s/ JOE ADAMS, Chairman