NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD

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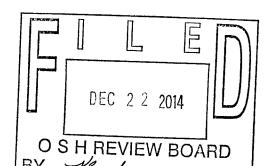
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Docket No. RNO 14-1700



Complainant,

VS.

CAMPBELL CONSTRUCTION CO., INC.,

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

INDUSTRY, STATE OF NEVADA,

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

Respondent.

DECISION

This matter came before the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH **REVIEW BOARD** at a hearing commenced on the 10^{th} day of July, 2014, in furtherance of notice duly provided according to law. MS. SALLI ORTIZ, behalf Chief ESQ., counsel appearing on of the Complainant, the Occupational Safety and Health Officer of Administrative Administration, Division of Industrial Relations (OSHA). MR. TODD SHAW, corporate president, appearing on behalf of Respondent, Campbell Construction Co., Inc.

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.

Citation 1, Item 1, charges a violation of 29 CFR 1926.652(a)(1), which provides in pertinent part:

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Each employee in an excavation shall be protected from cave-ins by an adequate protective system designed in accordance with paragraph (b) or (c) of this section.

Complainant alleged that at the construction site, three employees were working in an excavation that was approximately 9 feet deep, but not protected from cave-ins by an adequate protection system. The excavation included a vertical wall of approximately 6 feet before being sloped back approximately 3 feet. The competent person identified the soil as Type-B, however the configurations used were not in accordance with paragraph (b) or (c) for Type-A, Type-B or Type-C soils.

Campbell Construction was previously cited for a violation of the same or equivalent occupational safety and health standard as confirmed in NV OSHA inspection number 315175836, Citation number 01, Item number 001. The previous violation was confirmed as a final order on January 12, 2012.

The current alleged violation is classified as Repeat/Serious. The penalty proposed is in the amount of \$9,800.00.

The parties stipulated to the admission of evidence at complainant Exhibits 1 through 3 and additionally Exhibit 4 (added at time of redirect), as well as respondent Exhibits A through D. The parties further stipulated to certain proof elements of violation, specifically the applicability of the standard, exposure of employees, and employer knowledge. The stipulation further provided the only contested issue before the Review Board to be the existence of non-complying violative conditions.

Both parties provided a brief opening statement. Counsel for the

complainant referenced the stipulations of the parties and sole requirement for purposes of the hearing, to be proof of the violative conditions. She asserted the evidence will show there was a 9 foot deep trench excavation consisting of various soils conditions and vertical walls without required OSHA protection under the cited standard. The respondent claims the excavation was in "solid rock" and therefore exempted from the "cave-in" protection required by the standard.

The respondent opening statement confirmed the sole issue to be the existence of violative conditions. He asserted the complainants case is based upon a lack of proof of the soil classification made by the CSHO. The excavation was in stable rock and will be confirmed through expert engineering testimony to prove no cave-in protection, sloping or benching were required. Respondent asserts the CSHO was mistaken in the classification of the soil. CSHO Batton cited the standard without any testing or proof of the soils conditions. OSHA cannot meet the burden of proof to establish violations of the cited standard.

Counsel for complainant through Compliance Safety and Health Officer (CSHO) Ms. Chantelle Batton presented evidence and testimony as to the violation, classification and appropriateness of the penalty. Ms. Batton identified complainant Exhibits 1 through 3 (and later Exhibit 4 on redirect). Ms. Batton referenced her narrative report at Exhibit 1, pages 8 through 10, the worksheets (OSHES-1B at pages 20-22), and the photographs taken at the site numbered 45-48. She identified the previous citation issued to the respondent as the basis for classifying the serious violation as a "Repeat" at Exhibit 1, pages 49 through 66.

Ms. Batton testified she was directed to inspect the subject work site based upon a referral complaint that employees were working in an unshored/unprotected excavation at the Sommerset subdivision in Reno,

Nevada. During the "walkaround" inspection, CSHO Batton was assisted by CSHO Riley and accompanied by Mr. Rob Poirier the superintendent of Campbell Construction. She was informed Campbell Construction was contracted to install a sewer line for the Dell Webb housing development located in the Reno Sommerset community. Ms. Batton testified she observed employees working in a trench at a depth of 9-10 feet without required shoring. Three identified respondent employees were observed working in the 9 feet deep trench without adequate benching or sloping on the sidewalls. The 9 foot measurement was taken by the respondent foreman, Mr. Roberto Martin using a standard steel tape and subject to photographic exhibits in evidence. A secondary measurement utilizing the rungs of a ladder measured with a standard steel tape was taken by Ms. Batton and CSHO Riley to verify the depth of the trench. The length between each rung was one foot. By observing the rungs of the ladder in relation to the side walls the CSHOs determined the excavation had vertical walls 6 feet high before the top 3 feet of soil sloped back to 42 degrees.

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CSHO Batton testified that Mr. Martin and Mr. Poirier, respectively the foreman and superintendent of respondent, informed her the soil in the trench was "Type-B". Mr. Poirier also informed her the respondent had obtained an ". . . engineered soil analysis report confirming the soil was Type-B . . . ". A Geotechnical Investigation Report provided to her by Kleinfelder Inc. in 2004 confirmed the Type-B soils analysis results. It included a recommendation that temporary trench excavations comply with current OSHA safety requirements for Type B soils.

Ms. Batton testified her observations of the actual excavation and soils materials were that the 6 foot vertical wall contained ". . . stones, visible cobbles, and clear sloughing." The 3 foot sloped top

layer was mostly loose soil with some larger pieces of rock in the mix. The soils report provided by respondent to CSHO Batton established that all soils in the area were to be treated as Type B because the area soils at the site "varied". She referenced page 123 of the soils report to confirm same. Foreman Martin informed CSHO Batton that based upon the soils condition he cut slopes differently at various depths. She referenced Exhibit 1, page 18 of the Martin interview statement.

Ms. Batton identified the interview statement at page 17, Exhibit 1, to establish the respondent employees had been ". . . working in the trench . . . about a week." She testified respondent employees working in the trench informed her they had no specific excavation training. Photographic Exhibit 1, page 45a depicted three employees in the trench.

Ms. Batton testified photographic Exhibit 1, page 47a depicted the excavation sidewalls with cobbles and fissures in the "spoils" near the edge. She testified the ". . . rocks and fissures she observed and depicted in the photographs . . . confirmed the excavation was not in stable rock because it (stable rock) does not contain cobbles and fissures . . .".

CSHO Batton identified the two "competent person" employees of respondent and testified they reported to her the soils conditions to be Type "B". She testified the trench was not protected in accordance with the applicable cited OSHA standard. Based upon her observations, the photographs, interview reports from the competent persons, the geological data, Kleinfelder report, and confirmation from the respondent soils engineer, Micky Smith, obtained after the closing conference, CSHO Batton concluded the inspected excavation was in varied soils not entirely stable rock, and therefore required protection in accordance with the specific terms of the OSHA standards. She could

find no evidence, documents or reports to contradict her observations and conclusions.

On cross-examination CSHO Batton testified she had one year of training with supervisors and took classes on construction, but not specifically trained on shoring or excavations. She did not classify the soil at the time of inspection but took samples from the "spoils" pile. She did no mechanical testing at the site nor was the sample sent to a laboratory. CSHO Batton testified she performed an analysis of the soils and determined from all information available the soils were Type B as reported to her by the two competent persons and described in the Kleinfelder engineering report.

On continued cross-examination CSHO Batton testified she was not trained on soils classifications nor visual and/or manual mechanical testing procedures. Ms. Batton admitted she was not aware at the time of the inspection that OSHA permitted work in an excavation if a "vertical wall" was in stable rock. She testified that trenches dug later at the site during the testing procedure demonstrated the soils varied and "... some areas were in stable rock."

In direct and re-direct examination, CSHO Batton testified her observations and the investigative information obtained, including cobbles and fissures identified in the soils material, caused she and her supervisor to conclude there was no evidence to support an exception to the standard. The requirement of the applicable OSHA standard is the excavation be ". . entirely in stable rock . . ". Based upon the varied soils observed, the statements from the competent persons and the Kleinfelder report, she concluded there was no evidence the excavation was "entirely in stable rock" and therefore required protection in accordance with the terms of the standard.

At the conclusion of complainant's case, respondent presented testimonial and documentary evidence through Ms. Michelle (Mickey) She identified herself as a professional engineer with Wood Rodgers Geotechnical Services and experienced in soil analyses and testing in the Reno, Nevada area. Ms. Smith described the area soils based upon geotechnical mapping and her testing procedures. The testing did not occur in the excavations subject of citation because they had been "backfilled". She was accompanied by respondent representatives and CSHO Carling. Ms. Smith described the recognized protocols during the test "digs". She found 1-1/2 feet of top Type B soil, but below that level Type A stable rock. Ms. Smith identified her report at Exhibit D consisting of four pages. She found bedrock 15-28 inches below the surface. Exhibit D, page 4 identified Type B soils on the sloped Ms. Smith testified the soils depicted in the photographs at Exhibit 1, page 47a did not show "fissures" as identified by CSHO Batton but merely discoloration. She explained her interpretation of the photographs in evidence and testified they do not support any finding of fissures. Ms. Smith testified that in her opinion the excavation soils tested should be characterized as stable rock. She further testified the exhibit photographs do not show "cobble" but rather "pieces of rock" dug out of an excavation. Ms. Smith explained ". . . you can have rocks within stable rock which is identified as She testified that Exhibit A reflects the excavation conglomerate". "boring results". The testing demonstrated "bedrock and stable hard rock". She testified Exhibit 1, page 13 supported her opinion the cited trenches in the area were in excavations consisting of stable rock.

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On re-direct examination, Ms. Smith testified the problem with CSHO Batton's analysis was that she obtained her samples from the "spoils

pile, not the actual excavation". At page 4, Exhibit D, Ms. Smith explained the claimed confusion of her statement as merely an effort to help CSHO Batton understand varied soils and why the excavation was in stable rock.

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On cross-examination, Ms. Smith testified she never saw the actual open trench subject of citation, but only observed the worksite area after the subject excavations had been backfilled. She testified "stable or hard rock" is equated with "bedrock". Reference to either is ". . . the same to indicate Type A, the hardest material and exempted from cave-in protection; Type B requires OSHA protection . . ".

At conclusion of the evidence and testimony, complainant and respondent presented closing argument.

Complainant asserted she does not understand why information provided by the two "competent persons" employed by respondent at the site should not be believed along with the OSHA observations supported by photographs to confirm the loose condition of the soils materials. She argued the evidence clearly demonstrates soils material made up of "other than stable rock . . in the open excavation in which employees were working . . .". It is unrefuted the cited excavation was neither shored nor protected. It was unrefuted respondent employees were working in the trench and exposed to potential cave-in hazards without any protection.

The 2004 Kleinfelder geological report which respondent relied upon reflected soils in the area were ". . . varied and should be treated overall as Type B . . . ". The soils varied greatly from area to area on this site and included clay and even sandstone.

The Smith report, Exhibit D at page 4, included the email exchange between Ms. Smith and CSHO Batton. It referenced the CSHO question

"[i]s it your position that the area where Campbell Construction was excavating has Type A (bedrock) on the vertical sides and Type B (fill) on the sloped sides?" The answer from engineer Smith was "yes." That written exchange alone showed the soils were **varied** in the area so the excavation "not entirely in stable rock", therefore subject to the cave-in protection standards without exemption.

Respondent provided closing statement. Mr. Shaw asserted the inspected excavations were all in stable rock based upon the evidence, testimony and observations of even CSHO Carling who participated in the testing procedure. He argued that respondent "competent persons," Martin and Poirier, were referencing Type B as merely the top layer of soil but there was no question the material underneath was stable rock. The Type B that CSHO Batton referred to in the geological report only described the surface materials and not the bedrock nature of the excavations.

The Board in reviewing the facts, documentation, testimony and other evidence must measure same against the established applicable law developed under the Occupational Safety & Health Act.

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. Armor Elevator Co., 1 OSHC 1409, 1973-1974 OSHD $\P16,958$ (1973).

To prove a violation of a standard, the Secretary must establish (1) the applicability of the 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 Belger Cartage Service, Inc., 79 OSAHRC 16/B4, 7 BNA OSHC 1233, 1235, 1979 CCH OSHD ¶23,400, p.28,373 (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. Secretary of Labor, 351 F.3d 1254, 1261 (D.C. Cir. 2003).

A respondent may rebut allegations by showing:

- That the standard was inapplicable to the situation at issue;
- 2. That the situation was in compliance; or lack of access to a hazard. See, Anning-Johnson Co., 4 OSHC 1193, 1975-1976 OSHD \P 20,690 (1976).

A "serious" violation is established 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.

A "repeat" violation is established if based upon a prior violation of the same standard, a different standard, or general duty clause, if the present and prior violation is substantially similar.

A violation is considered a repeat violation:

If, at the time of the alleged repeat violation, there was a Commission final order against the employer for a substantially similar violation. Potlatch Corp., 7 BNA OSHC 1061, 1063 (no. 16183, 1979). A prima facie case of substantial substantial similarity is established by a showing that the prior and present violations were for failure to comply with the same standard. Superior Electric Company, 17 BNA OSHC 1635, 1638 (No. 91-1597, 1996). Robert B. Reich, Secretary of Labor, United States Department of Labor v. D.M. Sabia Company Occupational Safety and Health Committee, 90 F.3d 854 (1996); Caterpillar, Inc. v. Herman, M. Secretary of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Respondents and United Auto Workers, Local 974, Intervenors, 154 F.3d 400 (1998).

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A repeated violation may be found based on a prior the same standard, a different violation of standard, or the general duty clause, but the present and prior violations must be substantially similar. Caterpillar, Inc., 18 OSH Cases 1005, 1006 (Rev. Comm'n 1997), aff's, 154 F.3d 400, 18 OSH Cases 1481 (7th Cir. 1998); GEM Indus., Inc., 17 OSH Cases 1861, 1866 (Rev. Comm'n 1996). OSHA may establish its prima facie case generally substantial similarity by showing that the prior and present violations are of the same standard. The employer may rebut that showing by establishing that the violations were substantially different. Where the citations involve different standards, evidence" present "sufficient must OSHA similarity substantial the establish A similar showing must be made if the violations. standard but the same involve citations Repeated violations standard is broadly worded. are not limited to factually identical occurrences. Provided that the hazards are similar, minor differences in the way machines work or in the size and shape of excavations will usually not lead to a finding of dissimilarity. In general, the key factor is whether the two violations resulted in substantially similar hazards. It is not necessary, that the seriousness of the however, two violations be the involved in the Rabinowitz, Occupational Safety and Health Law, 2nd Ed. 2008 at pp. 230-231. (emphasis added)

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"Repeat" violation warrant confirmed to previous The The respondent admitted by stipulation classification was unrefuted. to three of the proof elements required under the complainant's burden The stipulated sole element in contention was evidence of non-complying conditions based upon a lack of proof the excavation consisted of anything other than stable rock. Support for the stable rock condition was based upon the testimony and interpretations of engineer Smith and her written report at Exhibit D. The respondent defense and rebuttal of prima facia evidence of violation turns on whether it satisfied the exception in the standard 29 CFR 1926.652(a)(1) which provides "an excavation need not be protected from cave-ins if (i) excavations are made entirely in stable rock . . . ". Reliance upon the

exception must be supported by credible preponderant evidence to rebut the prima facia proof of violation.

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The testimonial evidence by CSHO Batton of observed varied soils in the actual open excavation was credible and corroborated by additional evidence in the record. The photographs in evidence depicted soils that, from plain view, were other than stable rock. The 2004 Kleinfelder report provided by respondent described "... varied soils throughout the area which should be treated for OSHA purposes as Type B classification . . . and the . . . excavations protected accordingly . . . ". The respondent's designated competent persons provided written statements to Ms. Batton when she arrived at the site that the soils were Type B. The complainant met the burden of proof to establish a prima facia case of violation.

To rebut the prima facia evidence of violation the respondent was required to prove by preponderant evidence the cited excavations were entirely in stable rock and therefore exempted from required cave-in However the expert testimony and documentary reports protection. offered through respondent witness Smith were equivocal, unclear, and neither convincing, nor preponderant evidence to rebut the evidence of violation. Exhibit D, page 4, clearly demonstrated Ms. Smith admitted the excavation was not entirely stable rock by agreeing the soils Witness Smith's attempted explanation contradicted the plain varied. meaning of her written opinion. Her testimony was not convincing nor credible to support or prove the defense of exemption based upon the The cited standard entire excavation consisting of stable rock. specifically provides that for an excavation to qualify for exception to the cave-in protection standard, it must be "entirely in stable rock". However, Exhibit D, page 4, was evidence to the contrary. Ιt

supported complainant evidence of **varied** soils as admitted by Ms. Smith. Further, the Smith testing was conducted **after** the cited excavations were backfilled and not in the actual excavations observed and photographed during the inspection.

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The testimony of CSHO Carling was that during the excavation testing he observed varied soils not entirely stable rock. His testimony was credible and corroborated by the Kleinfelder report, the photographs taken during the initial inspection, respondent employee interview statements, and CSHO Batton's testimonial observations of the actual open excavation.

This Board is sensitive to the impact of a serious violation upon the respondent or any employer. When it is additionally classified as repeat/serious, the contested case requires strict evidentiary review to assure fairness to the employer, but also recognition that occupational safety and health law is focused upon employee safety in the workplace. While this Board regrets the effects of a repeat/serious violation on this or any Nevada employer, it must weigh all the facts and testimony and render a fair and impartial decision based solely upon the preponderance of evidence. This includes the weight, competence, and credibility of all evidence presented. In this case, the credible CSHO testimony, the reports and statements obtained during the inspection, the Kleinfelder report, and photographs taken of the actual open excavations all support finding the subject excavation not composed entirely of stable rock. There is no factual or lawful basis to warrant an exception to the cited excavation protection standard.

The Board finds a preponderance of evidence of violation at Citation 1, Item 1, confirms the classification of repeat/serious and approves the proposed penalty of \$9,800.00.

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 1, 29 CFR 1926.652(a)(1). The classification of "Repeat/Serious" is appropriate and affirmed. The proposed penalty is confirmed in the amount of Nine Thousand Eight Hundred Dollars (\$9,800.00).

OFFICER OF THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ENFORCEMENT SECTION,
DIVISION OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, to prepare and 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 22nd day of December 2014.

NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD

By: /s/
JOE ADAMS, CHAIRMAN