NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD

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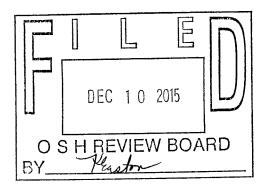
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
OF THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND
HEALTH ADMINISTRATION, DIVISION
OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND
INDUSTRY,

Complainant,

VS.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA NAIL CO., INC.,

Respondent.



Docket No. RNO 16-1813

DECISION

This matter came before the NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD at a hearing commenced November 9, 2015, in furtherance of notice duly provided according to law. MS. SALLI ORTIZ, ESQ., counsel appearing on behalf of the Complainant, Chief Administrative Officer of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Division of Industrial Relations (OSHA). MR. BOB PETERSON, ESQ., appearing on behalf of Respondent, Northern California Nail Co., Inc.

Jurisdiction in this matter has been conferred in accordance with Chapter 618 of the Nevada Revised Statutes.

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 1926.501(b)(2)(i) which provides in pertinent part:

Each employee who is constructing a leading edge 6 feet (1.8 m) or more above lower levels shall be protected from falling by guardrail systems, safety net systems, or personal fall arrest systems. Exception: When the employer can demonstrate that it is infeasible or creates a greater hazard to use these systems, the employer shall develop and implement a fall protection plan which meets the requirements of paragraph (k) of 1926.502.

Complainant alleged that located on the north end of the roof, an employee constructing a leading edge was exposed to a 42 foot fall to the ground below. The employee was nailing down panels within eight feet of the leading edge, but was not protected by guardrail systems, safety net systems, or personal fall protection.

The violation was classified as Serious. The proposed penalty was in the amount of One Thousand Two Hundred Dollars (\$1,200.00).

Citation 2, Item 1, charges a violation of NRS 618.987(1) which provides in pertinent part:

Requirements to present employer with completion card. If a construction worker other than a supervisory employee fails to present his or her employer with a current and valid completion card for an OSHA-10 course not later than 15 days after being hired, the employer shall suspend or terminate his or her employment.

Complainant alleged that located at the Red Rock 200 construction project, a construction worker did not obtain an OSHA-10 hour completion card not later than 15 days after being hired, and the employer die not suspend or terminate his employment. The construction worker had worked at the site for four weeks.

The violation was classified as Regulatory. The proposed penalty was in the amount of One Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$150.00).

The parties stipulated to the admission of evidence identified as complainant's Exhibits 1 through 4; no documentary exhibits were offered by respondent.

Counsel for complainant and respondent represented that Citation 2, Item 1, referencing a violation of NRS 618.987(1), classified as

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"Regulatory" and with a proposed penalty of \$150.00 was subject of withdrawal of contest and for which no evidence or testimony presented at the time of hearing.

Counsel for the complainant presented evidence and testimony in support of the violation, and appropriateness of the classification and penalty.

Safety Specialist and Compliance Safety and Health Officer (CSHO) Mr. Luke Hendrickson testified he was assigned to conduct a comprehensive inspection at a job site in Las Vegas, Nevada identified as Red Rock 200. A three day "walkaround" inspection was conducted after initial contact with Alston Construction Company, the general contractor responsible for the 200,000 sq. ft. warehouse building project.

CSHO Hendrickson testified in support of the Citation 1, Item 1 violation. He identified the documents in evidence at Exhibits 1 through 4, and referenced the materials in his testimony.

CSHO Hendrickson and CSHO Gillings observed an employee exposed to a fall while working near the leading edge of the low slope roof structure. The employee was nailing plywood panels and was exposed to a 42 foot high fall without any "tie-off" or fall arrest safety system in place. He observed the condition in the company of the foreman of Panelized Structures, Inc., a subcontractor to the general contractor, Alston Construction Company. He was informed Panelized Structures had subcontracted a portion of its work to the respondent; and contractually responsible for supervision of respondent as well as its own employees. The respondent employee was instructed to come down from the roof by the Panelized Structures foreman. The subject employee was observed by the employer representatives identified at Exhibit 1 while in the company

of the CSHOs during the "walkaround" working without any fall arrest protection systems. The Panelized Structures foreman reported to CSHO Hendrickson that as long as the employee remained six feet away from the leading edge, fall protection was not required. The exposed respondent employee was identified as Mr. Chauteco. During the employee interview Mr. Chauteco reported foreman Carvalho told him to stay at least eight feet away from the leading edge.

CSHO Hendrickson reviewed the "Safety Standards for Fall Protection in the Construction Industry" issued by federal OSHA in evidence at Exhibit 1, page 51-52. He testified the document provided there is "no safe distance from an unprotected side or edge that would render fall protection unnecessary." During his inspection on the roof, CSHO Hendrickson observed that plywood panels in place near the leading edge contained "tie-off anchor points" along the entire width of the roof. He confirmed later that day that exposed employee Chauteco was actually employed by Northern California Nail, Inc., a subcontractor of Panelized Structures, Inc. CSHO Hendrickson contacted the owner of Northern California Nail and set the date for an opening conference which was conducted on April 22, 2015. He recommended a serious citation for the violation.

During the interview with Mr. Chauteco, CSHO Hendrickson discovered that he (Chauteco) did not have an OSHA 10 card. The employee reported he had never been to an OSHA 10 course. Mr. Chauteco was dismissed from the job site by Mr. Rushing and Ms. Moulden representatives of general contractor Alston Construction company. A regulatory citation was recommended.

Mr. Hendrickson identified photographs of respondent employee Chauteco at Exhibit 1, pages 50A and 51A. He testified the photographs

depicted the observed employee nailing down panels within eight feet of the roof leading edge, without protection by guardrail, safety net, nor any personal fall arrest systems. CSHO Hendrickson only observed one employee working on the roof and subject of the PPE citation.

CSHO Hendrickson identified the witness statement taken from employee Chauteco at Exhibit 1, page 17. He paraphrased the statement of the witness and read "my boss instructed me to be at least eight feet from the edge . . . I do not have an OSHA card . . . I have been working on the site for about a month . . . I have safety training for this site and have received training from my employer"

Mr. Hendrickson testified employee Chauteco informed him he was "up there every day." He determined the employer knew, based upon the discussions with employer representatives and the statements made by the employee, that work was being conducted without personal protection systems under a belief that no protection was required so long as the employee remained eight feet from the roof edge. Mr. Hendrickson testified the respondent employer was wrong in his interpretation of the standard, as was the Panelized Structures foreman responsible for supervision under whom the respondent was working. He explained the OSHA guidance at Exhibit 2, pages 52 and 53 clearly provided "... OSHA determined there is no safe distance from the edge to make the standard inapplicable " He referenced Exhibit 4, page 78 as the Letter of Interpretation which comports with the preamble of the ruling at Exhibit 2, page 52.

Mr. Hendrickson testified the violative conduct was in "plain view;" and subject of direct or constructive employer knowledge based upon the reported statements. He concluded the respondent and Panelized Structures foreman were mistaken in their understanding and

interpretation of the cited standard.

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At Exhibit 1, page 20, CSHO Hendrickson recommended the issuance of the violations. He testified the Panelized Structures subcontractor responsible for the nailing operations and supervision was also cited for the same Citation 1, Item 1 violation. The Exhibit 1 evidence established the respondent, Northern California Nail, was contracted by Panelized Structures, and its foreman on the job site in charge of the Northern California Nail employee.

Respondent counsel conducted cross-examination of CSHO Hendrickson. He testified that he personally observed employee Chauteco without any fall arrest protection system while engaged in nailing roofing panels near the edge of the roof structure. While inspecting the roof he observed the nail holes on the right side of a blue-green line on the plywood and estimated the distance from the edge and the line where employee Chauteco was working at approximately eight feet. He did not measure the line, but based his estimate on the standardized width of the plywood panels. He determined the violative conditions because there is no compliance exemption in the standards for an eight foot, or any specific distance, while working near a roof leading edge. reconfirmed his previous testimony on the OSHA letter ruling, responded to counsel question that tie-off or other fall arrest protection ". . . is required even if working in the middle of a 300 foot roof structure " He testified the OSHA letter provides there is "no safe distance." Mr. Hendrickson testified, referring to counsel's 300 foot example and whether he would issue a citation, that ". . . there is a de minimis distance of 50 foot from an edge under federal guidelines and Nevada follows federal OSHA on that "

CSHO Hendrickson continued responses to cross-examination and

testified the respondent did have a satisfactory fall protection program. He further testified that Nevada OSHA defines a "leading edge" in accordance with the CFR reference at Exhibit 1, page 18.

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On redirect examination, CSHO Hendrickson testified there was no question as to the distance the employee was working from the edge as being violative, even without a specific measurement, based upon his personal observations, the photograph in evidence and the admissions by the employer representative and employee statements of within eight feet. "Eyeballing" the working distance from the edge was additionally based upon the size of the plywood panels. His observation clearly confirmed the work area was not anywhere close to the 50 foot distance allowance federal OSHA referenced in the guidance at Exhibit 4, pages 52-53 to relegate the violative condition de minimis. He testified there was no need to know exactly what the employee was doing on the roof. The violative conditions were citable because there was no tieoff or fall arrest system in place while he was standing near the roof edge 42 feet above the ground. Reference was again made to the photographic evidence at Exhibit 1, page 50A.

At the conclusion of complainant's case, respondent presented evidence and testimony. Mr. Francis Howard (Butch) Tankersley identified himself as the owner of respondent Northern California Nail Co. He testified the employee in the pictorial evidence was "nailing the plywood sheets on the left of the blue line . . . all nails are to the left of the blue line . . . " He further testified that any nailing installation on the right side of the line was done by Panelized Structures employees. His employee was not tied off because the standard only requires that occur if working within eight feet of the edge. He testified "I measured from the blue line on the plywood to the

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edge and that was approximately eight foot." He further testified "the employee in the picture was not securing panels near the edge because that had already been done by the Panelized Structures subcontractor for whom his company was working " Mr. Tankersley continued his testimonial position that his employee was not working closer than eight feet and actually eight to ten feet from the leading edge, and therefore not in violation of the cited standard.

On cross-examination Mr. Tankersley confirmed his testimony that ". . . so long as the employee is not within six feet, he's not near the leading edge so no fall arrest protection is required" Tankersley testified he was not aware OSHA had a different interpretation of the standard. He testified ". . . I thought it was eight feet or more from the edge . . . never seen a definition of leading edge. . . . I always thought leading edge was eight feet or more."

At the conclusion of evidence and testimony, complainant and respondent presented closing arguments. Complainant asserted the burden of proof was met by the preponderance of evidence based upon the photographic exhibit demonstrating the employee working without fall protection at the undisputed height confirmed by the CSHO to be 42 feet above ground, and within eight feet of the edge. Counsel referenced the federal OSHA interpretation letter to establish there being "no safe distance" permitting exception from the fall protection standards. testimony of CSHO Hendrickson and Mr. Tankersley confirmed the employee was working within eight feet of the edge; and not even close to a 50 foot distance to qualify for a de minimis violation. factual question on the distance. The plain meaning of the standard was clear. The violation should be confirmed.

Respondent argued the general industry considers eight feet to be a safe working distance without fall protection, even if an employee tripped or fell. Counsel asserted the photograph demonstrates the employee without tie-off, but working to the left of the blue line shown on the plywood which was confirmed to be over eight feet from the edge. He argued "These . . . things are not all that simple . . . the whole definition of what is a 'leading edge' is not clear. Just because federal OSHA in 1990 took an absurd position that there is no such thing as any safe distance from a roof edge to establish a safe area . disregards . . . practice of the overall industry . . . and . . doesn't mean Nevada OSHA needs to follow that kind of nonsense conclusion. . . . " Counsel asserted there is no question the employee was not working at the actual "edge" because he was working eight feet away. ". . . So the problem is this case turns on a poor definition made by federal OSHA in 1990 and should not be followed by the Nevada Board . . . "

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To find a violation of the cited standard, the Board must consider the evidence and measure same against the established applicable law promulgated and 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 \$16,958 (1973).

Preponderance of the evidence means evidence that enables a trier of fact to determine that the existence of the contested fact is more probable than the nonexistence of the contested fact. NRS 233B, Sec. 2. Nassiri v. Chiropractic Physicians' Board of Nevada, 130 Nev. Adv. Op. No. 27, 327 P.3d 487 (2014)

To establish a prima facie case, the Secretary (Chief Administrative Officer) must prove 1) the cited standard applies; 2) the requirements of the standard were not met; 3) employees were exposed to or had access to the violative condition; 4) the employer knew or, through the exercise reasonable diligence could have known of violative condition; 5) there is substantial probability that death or serious physical harm could result from the violative condition (in a "serious" violation case). See *Bechtel* Corporation, 2 OSHC 1336, 1974-1975 OSHD ¶ 18,906 (1974); D.A. Collins Construction Co. Inc., v. Secretary of Labor, 117 F.3d 691 (2nd Cir. 1997). (emphasis added)

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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)

A respondent may rebut allegations by showing:

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

The Board finds preponderant evidence of employee hazard exposure and the required elements to satisfy the burden of proof to support a finding of the serious violation at Citation 1, Item 1, referencing 29 CFR 1926.501(b)(2)(i).

It was undisputed from the documentary evidence, testimony and arguments that respondent employee Mr. Chauteco was observed,

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photographed and admitted working within eight feet of the edge of the roof structure, nailing down plywood panels without any fall arrest protective system. The photographic exhibits and testimony established unrefuted evidence of anchor points located on the plywood panel structures to permit "tie-off." There was no evidence of infeasibility to compliance.

There is no dispute the standard was applicable to the facts in evidence.

Employer knowledge was subject of proof through the witness statement, the credible unrebutted testimonial observations of CSHO Hendrickson, the photographic exhibits of work in plain view, particularly the admissions of respondent witness Tankersley. testified that he believed there was no requirement for employee fall arrest protection so long as the employee was working a distance of eight feet from the edge of the roof. The disputed interpretation as to what is or is not a "leading edge" might be subject of discussion and analysis compared to the reality of what may occur in the industry; however the federal OSHA Interpretation Letter is established reasonable guidance for Nevada OSHA enforcement to assure the safety of employees at roofing worksites in this state.

Certainly all citations are subject to ultimate determinations of reasonableness. The documentary evidence and testimony, together with the interpretation letter recognize an option for treating violative conditions as de minimis. If employees are working at such an extended distance of 50 feet it can be determined a reasonably safe working area without fall arrest protection on a roof structure. The opportunity for reasonable and fair enforcement interpretations is available under the federal guidance which does not make the result absurd even though

unrealistic examples might be asserted. Notably, there were tie-off anchor points all along the roof to readily permit simple basic employee tie-off protection. There is no question the subject employee was exposed to fall hazards working within eight feet of the roof edge, 42 feet above the ground level, without any fall arrest protection. The respondent employer was under the mistaken belief the standards did not require fall arrest protection. The plain meaning of the standard clear.

The undisputed testimonial and documentary evidence established the violative conduct was appropriately classified as **serious** due to the potential injuries likely to be sustained by an employee falling from a distance of approximately 42 feet.

The respondent knew, or with the exercise of reasonable diligence, could have known that regardless of industry practice, OSHA does not recognize a safe working distance near a roof edge without fall protection and clearly not to be eight feet from the edge. The specific standard for protection is codified in the CFR and incorporated into Nevada law. The cited violation occurred in plain view and under the supervision of the foreman responsible for the job being performed by the respondent employees.

Employer will often be found to have constructive knowledge of violative conditions or practices that are in **plain sight**. Compare Simplex Time Recorder Co. v. Secretary of Labor, 766 F.2d 575, 589, 12 OSH Cases 1401 (D.C. Cir. 1985) (spray booth conditions and practices "readily apparent to anyone who looked"), with United States Steel Corp., 12 OSH Cases 1692, 1699 (Rev. Comm'n 1986) (exercise of reasonable diligence would not have disclosed ice block hidden by dirt and in a place where it would not have been expected).

Notwithstanding the responsibility for safety oversight being vested, contractually or by some agreement in Panelized Structures,

under established occupational safety and health law the direct employer is not relieved from the threshold statutory duty to protect its employees from exposure to workplace hazards and assure employee safety protection.

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Occupational safety and health law has long recognized the inability of an employer to avoid employee OSHA safety protection by contract or agreement. Frohlick Crane Service, Inc. v. Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission, 521 F.2d 628 (1975).

An employer has the affirmative duty to anticipate and protect against preventable hazardous conduct by employees. Leon Construction Co., 3 OSHC 1979, 1975-1976 OSHD ¶ 20,387 (1976).

It is well settled that knowledge, actual or constructive, of employer's supervisory an personnel will be imputed to the employer, unless the employer establishes substantial grounds for not doing so. Ormet Corp., 14 BNA OSHC 2134, 1991-93 CCH OSHD ¶29,254 (No. 85-531 1991). Commission held that once there is a prima facie showing of employer knowledge through a supervisory employee, the employer can rebut that showing by establishing that the failure of the supervisory employee to follow proper procedures unpreventable. In particular, the employer must establish that it had relevant work rules that it adequately communicated and effectively enforced. Consolidated Freightways Corp., 15 BNA OSHC 1317, 1991-93 CCH OSHD ¶29,500 (No. 86-531, (emphasis added)

Mr. Tankersley, the **actual** owner or respondent and employer of the exposed employee, testified he had **knowledge** his employee was working without fall arrest systems within eight feet of the roof edge. He testified other employees work under similar conditions based upon his belief that working eight feet from a roof edge is a safe distance not requiring fall arrest protection. Accordingly, notwithstanding the contractual or agreed responsibilities of the Panelized Structures foreman, respondent **employer knowledge** was confirmed by the evidence.

The facts, documentary and testimonial evidence established that regardless of any claimed industry practice, the applicable law supports the cited violation of the **specific standard** at Citation 1, Item 1, and the serious classification and proposed penalty approved.

The Board notes that Citation 2, Item 1 was not subject of contest. The allegations of the complaint are deemed proof of violation at Citation 2, Item 1. The regulatory classification is confirmed and proposed penalty approved.

It is the decision of the Nevada Occupational Safety and Health Review Board that a violation of Nevada Revised Statutes did occur as to Citation 1, Item 1, 29 CFR 1910.5019(b)(2)(i). The violation was properly classified as Serious and the proposed penalty of One Thousand Two Hundred Dollars (\$1,200.00) confirmed.

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 618.987(1). The violation was properly classified as Regulatory and the proposed penalty of One Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$150.00) confirmed.

The Board directs the complainant, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER OF THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ENFORCEMENT SECTION, 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 $\underline{10th}$ day of December 2015. NEVADA OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH REVIEW BOARD By /s/ JOE ADAMS, Chairman