

BWC

**BUREAU OF
WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

Division of Safety & Hygiene, Oliver R. Ocasek Government Office Bldg.
Room 403, 161 South High Street, Akron, Ohio 44308

PLAINTIFF'S
EXHIBIT
BRK-132

Phone: (216) 379-3370

August 27, 1991

Legal Section
Industrial Commission of Ohio
35 East Chestnut Street, 6TH Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

RE: OD 428510-22
Lynette Ellis
General Motors - Assembly
Warren, Ohio 44482

Attention: Judith Spencer

Dear Ms. Spencer:

At your request, this report has been prepared based upon information which you have provided in the facsimile file and upon additional information provided by management representatives during a July 3, 1991, visit to the General Motors Auto Assembly Plant, located in Lordstown, Ohio. Contacted at the plant during this visit was Mr. Carmen Pompeii, Safety Director.

This claimant, whose condition has been diagnosed as "active bronchial asthma", was hired as a temporary employee on May 14, 1990, and began work on that date in the body shop (Department 11). Her duties at that time involved the clamping of body sides into position for spot-welding.

Although not actually operating a welder, spot-welding was carried out in her general work area, however, no painting is done at this location. Early in the shift on her fifth day at this work assignment, May 18, 1990, the claimant experienced shortness of breath and wheezing, and was treated and released at the emergency room of a local hospital.

After being away from work for approximately two weeks, the claimant's physician released her to return to work on June 4, 1990. At that time, at the request of her physician, Ms. Ellis was transferred out of the body shop and reassigned to the trim shop (Department 17), where her duties involved the removal of instrument panel wiring harnesses from packing cartons and hanging them on a conveyor. There were no welding or painting operations in this general area, and apparently the claimant did not experience any further symptoms while working for approximately two additional weeks at this assignment. As stated by the company representative, while assigned to the trim shop, the claimant was discharged on June 14, 1990, for unsatisfactory performance as a temporary employee.

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Regarding the claimant's diagnosed illness, "Bronchial Asthma", it should be noted that Ms. Ellis was first diagnosed for having asthma in 1980 while she was serving in the U.S. Army. The claimant in a Bureau of Workers' Compensation Form (C-205) states that her previous attacks were not as severe as this one, and that for the past nine years she has had only occasional minor problems of this nature. From information provided in the file it is indicated that this individual's mother also had asthma.

Viewing the work sites where this individual was employed for very brief periods, it does not appear that exposures to any particular air contaminant would be considered excessive nor are there any known sensitizing agents such as diisocyanates used in these areas. Although as mentioned earlier, some spot welding is carried out near her former work location in the body shop, air monitoring carried out previously at similar operations in this department by the Division of Safety and Hygiene, has indicated that concentrations of welding fumes and metal fume were well below the exposure limits which have been established by OSHA or the ACGIH (American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienist). Normally at these very low concentrations, adverse health effects are not expected.

If the claimant, with a known history of asthma, has experienced a hypersensitive reaction to some substance in the body shop, it is likely that the reaction would occur upon any contact with the causative agent or agents. Nothing short of total elimination of these materials from the air will prevent symptoms in those persons who are sensitized to a particular substance. Even minute, trace levels of the antigen, sometimes at undetectable concentrations, may be sufficient to provoke a hypersensitivity reaction.

It is widely recognized that there is hardly anything that has not, at some time, provoked allergy-type symptoms in some individuals. If an individual has become sensitized to some substance in the workplace, to avoid future symptoms, they should be moved to another department, a step which was carried out by General Motors for this claimant at the recommendation of her physician. Apparently her discharge from this temporary employment involved other matters and was not related to her health problems.

Reviewing this claim file, there appears to be an inference that the claimant should not have been placed in the body shop because of her answer to a question on her application regarding her history of asthma. It also should be noted that this individual answered yes to each of the following questions on her application:

1. Do you feel able to do any work assignment given?
2. Have you ever worked in a dusty job?
3. In previous work have you ever been exposed to toxic gases, dust or fumes?

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Even though management felt that the claimant's answers to these questions appear to give an indication that she would have no problem working anywhere in this plant, she was placed in an area where no chemicals, paints, solvents or known sensitizers are in use. As mentioned earlier, the only known air contaminants in the body shop are very low concentrations of welding fume from spot welding operations. Measured at a similar operation in this plant, the concentrations were a small fraction of the suggested exposure limits, averaging less than 10% of the OSHA and ACGIH limits for total welding fume.

Sincerely,

Donald B. Meeker

Donald B. Meeker
Industrial Hygienist

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