

[Cite as *Raymond v. Ohio Dept. of Transp.*, 2005-Ohio-6284.]

IN THE COURT OF CLAIMS OF OHIO

DENNIS RAYMOND :
Plaintiff :
v. : CASE NO. 2005-02796-AD
OHIO DEPARTMENT OF : MEMORANDUM DECISION
TRANSPORTATION :
Defendant :
: : : : : : : : : : : : : : : :

FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶ 1} On January 23, 2004, at approximately 4:30 p.m., plaintiff, Dennis Raymond, was traveling westbound on State Route 2 between exit 83 and exit 611, when a truck in front of him changed lanes and dislodged a road reflector. The reflector was propelled into the underside of his vehicle.

{¶ 2} Plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover \$273.70, his cost for automobile repairs, the police report and reimbursement of the filing fee which he submitted with the complaint. Plaintiff contends he incurred these damages as a result of negligence on the part of defendant, Department of Transportation, in failing to maintain the roadway.

{¶ 3} Defendant denied liability based on the fact it had no knowledge the reflector was broken and detached prior to plaintiff's property-damage occurrence. Defendant asserts it received no calls or complaints prior to plaintiff's incident. Because no complaints were received, defendant had no way of knowing or determining exactly how long the reflector was loose prior to plaintiff's incident. Defendant contends the reflector

loosened "for only a relatively short amount of time before plaintiff's incident."

{¶ 4} Plaintiff has not submitted any evidence to indicate the length of time the reflector was defective prior to the incident forming the basis of this claim.

{¶ 5} Defendant denied the roadway reflector was uprooted by any conduct under its control. Defendant asserted the reflector was uprooted by an unidentified motorist. Therefore, defendant contended it cannot be held liable for the act of an unidentified third party.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶ 6} Defendant has the duty to keep the roads 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 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.

{¶ 7} For plaintiff to prevail on a claim of negligence, he must prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, that defendant owed him a duty, that it breached that duty, and that the breach proximately caused his injuries. *Strother v. Hutchinson* (1981), 67 Ohio St. 2d 282, 285. Plaintiff has the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that he suffered a loss and that this loss was proximately caused by defendant's negligence. *Barnum v. Ohio State University* (1977), 76-0368-AD. However, "[i]t is the duty of a party on whom the burden of proof rests to produce evidence which furnishes a reasonable basis for sustaining his claim. If the evidence so produced furnishes only a basis for a choice among different possibilities as to any issue in the case, he failed to sustain such burden." Paragraph three of the syllabus in *Steven v. Indus. Comm.* (1945), 145 Ohio St. 198, approved and followed.

{¶ 8} Ordinarily, in a claim involving damages caused by broken road reflectors, plaintiff must prove either: 1) defendant had actual or constructive notice of the defective condition (loosened reflector) and failed to respond in a reasonable time or responded in a negligent manner, or 2) the defendant, in a general sense, maintains its highways negligently. *Denis v. Department of Transportation* (1976), 75-0287-AD.

{¶ 9} 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.

{¶ 10} Plaintiff has not produced any evidence to indicate the length of time the damage causing reflector was present in its loosened condition prior to the incident forming the basis of this claim. No evidence has been submitted to show defendant had actual notice of the reflector's condition. 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 defective condition (loosened reflector) appeared. *Spires v. Highway Department* (1988), 61 Ohio Misc. 2d 262. There is no indication defendant had constructive notice of the reflector's condition. Finally, 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 (loosened reflector). *Herlihy v. Ohio Department of Transportation* (1999), 99-07011-AD.

{¶ 11} Plaintiff has failed to show, 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 the damage-causing object was connected to any conduct under the control of defendant or any negligence on the part of defendant. *Taylor v.*

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