

Georgia Law on Idiopathic Injuries – Lunch Call on 03/08/23

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- What is an idiopathic injury? An injury that was due to a personal health condition.
 - No statute or rule specifically defining an idiopathic injury. Created and governed by case law.
 - We are arguing that the injury did not “arise out of” the course of employment. The injury almost always meets the “in the course of” employment requirement since it is typically undisputed that the claimant was on the job.
 - Often times involves a fall.
 - Injury can still be compensable even if caused by personal health condition IF it involved some type of employment risk.
- Need to be very thorough on all details of the accident when taking an initial written or recorded statement.
- Key questions to ask when conducting investigation:
 - What was the claimant doing at the time of the accident?
 - Were they performing a job related function? (walking, on a ladder, etc.)
 - If walking, at what kind of pace? (normal, hurried due to job duties, etc.)
 - Were they carrying anything? (i.e. tools or other items needed to perform job)
 - Were they on the phone or texting? If so, was it for work or personal reasons?
 - If claimant fell, did they trip over anything related to work? (work product or materials, water or slippery floor, etc.)
 - If claimant fell, what did they hit? (the floor, machinery, etc.)
 - Working area/conditions (lighting, open area or cramped space, etc.)
- General rules and principles:
 - Generally, a fall directly to the floor is not compensable, but still ask yourself the questions above.
 - A fall hitting something specific to work, such a toolbox or machinery, is compensable even if a personal health condition caused the fall (ex: a seizure or syncope).
 - Focus on whether the work duties and job environment created a new risk.
- Cases:
 - Cartersville City Schools v. Johnson (2018) – Teacher who fell and injured knee while teaching students and walking between classroom desks found compensable (Reasoning: Moving quickly while teaching and swift movements in uniquely configured classroom).

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- Harris v. Peach County Board of Commissioners (2009) – Custodian bent over to pick up her own personal medication and felt pop in knee found compensable (Reasoning: Job duties required she clean all debris from floor).
- Chaparral Boats, Inc. v. Heath (2004) – Pop in knee while walking at brisk pace across employer’s parking lot to clock in not compensable (Reasoning: No connection between injury and job duties).
- Prudential Bank v. Moore (1996) – Fall hitting baseboard on the bottom of a wall not compensable (Reasoning: Not hazard specific to work).
- United States Casualty Company v. Richardson (1947) – Seizure that resulted in fall and hitting sharp edge of work table found compensable (Reasoning: Risk of injury increased due to dangers of employment).



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