



## **Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant**

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

SHERRIE D. HOLDSWORTH, individually and as Personal Representative for the Estate of KEVAN A. HOLDSWORTH, Deceased,

Respondents,

v.

SCAPA WAYCROSS, INC.,

Appellant,

3M COMPANY, f/k/a Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company; ALASKA COPPER COMPANIES, INC., a Washington corporation; ALBANY INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION; ASTENJOHNSON INC.; AW CHESTERTON COMPANY; CBS CORPORATION; a Delaware corporation, f/k/a VIACOM, INC., successor by merger to CBS CORPORATION, a Pennsylvania corporation, f/k/a WESTINGHOUSE ELECTRIC CORPORATION; CRANE CO.; EJ BARTELLS SETTLEMENT TRUST, a Washington corporation; GARDNER DENVER NASH LLC, individually and as successor in interest to NASH ENGINEERING COMPANY; GENERAL ELECTRIC COMPANY; GOULDS PUMPS, LLC; No. 83564-5-I

DIVISION ONE

ORDER AMENDING OPINION HARDER MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS; INGERSOLL RAND COMPANY; IMO INDUSTRIES, LLC, individually and as successor in interest to DELAVAL; ITT CORPORATION, individually and as successor in interest to ALLIS- CHALMERS; JOHN CRANE INC; METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY; SULZER PUMPS (US), INC., f/k/a SULZER BINGHAM PUMPS, INC.; UNION CARBINE CORPORATION; and VIKING PUMP COMPANY,

Defendants.

The opinion for this case was filed on March 13, 2023. A majority of



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

the panel requests that the opinion filed on March 13, 2023 be amended and the portion of the sentence on page 17 of the opinion

Now therefore, it is hereby

ORDERED that the opinion filed on March 13, 2023 be amended.

FOR THE COURT: IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

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v.

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Appellant,

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DIVISION ONE

UNPUBLISHED OPINION GOULDS PUMPS, LLC; HARDER MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS; INGERSOLL RAND COMPANY; IMO INDUSTRIES, LLC, individually and as successor in interest to DELAVAL; ITT CORPORATION, individually and as successor in interest to ALLIS-CHALMERS; JOHN CRANE INC; METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY; SULZER PUMPS (US), INC., f/k/a SULZER BINGHAM PUMPS, INC.; UNION CARBINE CORPORATION; and VIKING PUMP COMPANY,

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## **Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant**

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

HAZELRIGG, J. Scapa Waycross, Inc. appeals a jury verdict awarding nearly \$17 million to Kevan his surviving spouse. Scapa Waycross argues there was insufficient evidence to prove its products were a in denying its motions for judgment as a matter of law. Further, Scapa Waycross curative instruction at the end of closing arguments was an improper comment on the evidence, requiring reversal. We disagree and affirm.

### **FACTS**

From 1964 to 2001, Kevan Holdsworth worked at a paper mill 1 in Camas, Washington (Camas mill or the mill). During his 37-year career at the Camas mill, Holdsworth held multiple positions and was exposed to asbestos from several 1 The mill was operated by Crown Zellerbach and is now run by Georgia-Pacific. sources at the site. From 1969 to 1976, he worked on the paper machine cleanup crew. In that position, Holdsworth participated in the cleaning process, i.e., the During that time period, Scapa Waycross (Scapa) supplied 238 dryer felts to the Camas mill and 141 of those felts contained asbestos. Dryer felts are absorbent materials that are used in paper machines to move wet sheets of paper through the drying end of the machine. Of the 14 paper machines at the Camas mill, 11 - containing dryer felts.

2

During a blow down, the cleanup crew used air hoses to blow the dust off



## **Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant**

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

the paper machines, from top to bottom, inside and out. After blowing down the tops of the machine hoods, they would go inside of a paper machine onto the dryer felts and blast the pressurized air onto the felts. Every three weeks, each machine

2 Photograph of one of the paper machines at the Camas mill which was admitted at trial as Exhibit 2365. had a scheduled blow down; the cleanup crew conducted two to three blow downs

per week, which covered the workers in dust from both the felts and the machines.

Beyond participating in blow downs, Holdsworth would also replace degraded dryer felts, a process which included cutting up the used felts.

From 1976 to 1988, Holdsworth worked in the maintenance department at the Camas mill. As part of his regular duties during this time, Holdsworth used a hammer to break off chunks of insulation from the pumps, which produced a large amount of dust. The insulation was known to contain asbestos. From 1988 to 1995, Holdsworth worked with the paint shop and would remove and replace insulation on various pipes. From 1995 to 2001, Holdsworth finished his career at the Camas mill in the pipe shop, where he worked with valves, pipes, gaskets, and packing materials.

In December 2018, Holdsworth was diagnosed with mesothelioma.

Holdsworth and his wife, Sherrie, 3 sued Scapa and other asbestos manufacturers based on his exposure at the Camas mill. In 2019, Holdsworth passed away, and Sherrie filed an amended complaint asserting claims on her own behalf and as the primary judgment



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

that was denied, and the case proceeded to trial.

videotaped perpetuation deposition was played for the jury. Scapa moved for

judgment as a matter of law under CR 50 at the cl -in-

chief, which the court denied. Scapa then renewed it at the close of all evidence,

3 Because they share the same last name, we refer to Sherrie Holdsworth by her first name as needed for clarity. We intend no disrespect. but the trial court again denied the motion. The jury was instructed on strict liability

for defective design, strict liability for failure to warn, and negligence. During

to the jury relating to

its consideration of damages and substantial factors. The trial court provided a

curative instruction to the jury, t tion presented by argument. Scapa objected to the instruction as given. After deliberation, the jury

returned a verdict of \$16,674,097.49 million in favor of Holdsworth Sherrie. Several months after the verdict, Scapa again renewed its motion for

judgment as a matter of law and also moved for a new trial under CR 59; both

motions were denied. Scapa timely appealed.

### ANALYSIS

#### I. Substantial Evidence and Reasonable Inferences Under CR 50

a matter of law, arguing there was insufficient evidence of both exposure and

proximate cause. and should never have be

As a preliminary matter, H.B.H. v. State, 192 Wn.2d 154, 162, 429 P.3d 484 (2018). As

our state constitution confers on juries the and determine the facts, there is a strong presumption that jury verdicts are



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

correct. James v. Robeck, 79 Wn.2d 864, 869, 490 P.2d 878 (1971); Bunch v.

King County Dep't of Youth Servs., 155 Wn.2d 165, 179, 116 P.3d 381 (2005). We review the trial court's denial of a motion for judgment as a matter of law

under the same standard as the trial court. Stiley v. Block, 130 Wn.2d 486, 504,

925 P.2d 194 (1996). A CR 50 motion for judgment as a matter of law may only

nonmoving party, there is no substantial evidence or reasonable inferences

therefrom to support a verdict for the nonmov H.B.H., 192 Wn.2d at 162.

Lockwood v. A C & S, Inc.,

109 Wn.2d 235, 243, 744 P.2d 605 (1987). Substantial evidence exists when it is

-minded, rational person of the truth of the declared

Brown v. Superior Underwriters, 30 Wn. App. 303, 306, 632 P.2d 887

(1980). Rather than reweighing conflicting evidence, we hat the jury

resolved every conflict and drew every reasonable inference in favor of the

Coogan v. Borg-Warner Morse Tec Inc., 197 Wn.2d 790, 812-

13, 490 P.3d 200 (2021). unsuppor Burnside v. Simpson Paper Co., 123 Wn.2d

93, 107-08, 864 P.2d 937 (1994).

A. xposure to Asbestos Dryer Felts

Traditional products liability theory requires a reasonable connection

between the harm suffered by the plaintiff, the product that caused the harm, and

the manufacturer of that product. Martin v. Abbott Lab'ys, 102 Wn.2d 581, 590,

689 P.2d 368 (1984). Accordingly, plaintiffs must identify the particular



## **Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant**

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

manufacturer of the product that caused the injury. Lockwood, 109 Wn.2d at 245. In asbestos cases, it is well settled that plaintiffs may establish exposure

to a defendant's product through direct or circumstantial evidence. Morgan v.

Aurora Pump Co., 159 Wn. App. 724, 729, 248 P.3d 1052 (2011). To identify the

-containing product to which they were exposed, plaintiffs

may rely on witnesses whose testimony merely places the at

the workplace during the relevant time period. Lockwood, 109 Wn.2d at 247. No

detailed recollection of circumstances surrounding the exposure to the asbestos-

containing product is required. Morgan, 159 Wn. App. at 729. When exposure is

Id. (quoting Arnold v. Sanstol, 43 Wn.2d 94,

99, 260 P.2d 327 (1953)).

From 1969 to 1976, Scapa supplied the Camas mill with 141 asbestos-

containing dryer felts. Holdsworth and his coworker, Robert Crowson, both recalled

at the Camas mill. During

that time period, Holdsworth participated in blow downs on every paper machine

at the mill, and 11 14 paper machines used -

containing dryer felts. This evidence alone is sufficient under Lockwood to

-containing product at the

Camas mill, and more than satisfies the substantial evidence or reasonable

inferences standard under H.B.H. to survive a CR 50 challenge. However,

Holdsworth presented even more detailed evidence to prove exposure to asbestos The entire cleanup crew participated in two to three blow downs per week;



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

each machine had scheduled blow downs every three weeks and additional unscheduled blow downs for maintenance. In general, each machine had three to six dryer felts distributed between the top and bottom sections of the machine. To blow down the top felts, the cleanup crew members would first get on structures above the machines, blowing dust from the top of the dryer section down to the operating room floor, and then get inside of the paper machines, standing directly on the dryer felts while blasting the felts with pressurized air. Once the top dryer felts were blown down, the crew would move to the bottom felts. At this stage, they would go to the basement with their blowpipes, walk directly onto the lower felts, and blast them with compressed air. Once all of the dust from a paper machine was driven to the basement, there would be about one- to two-and-a-half inches of dust beneath the dry section of the machine. The crew would then rake as much of the dust as they could into dust pans, vacuum any dust that remained, and blow any residue back towards the dryer section. As a result of the blow down process, the crew members would be covered in dust.

three quarters of an inch of dust on you, it was a pretty light day

Crowson further testified that, while they worked together on the cleanup

crew, every machine, every fabric, multi[ple] Another Camas mill worker

specifically recalled Holdsworth conducting blow downs on paper machines 15 and

16, which ran a combined total of 31 of Scapa asbestos-containing dryer felts during the relevant period. asbestos-containing felts ran on various paper





## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

machines at the mill for considerable time periods, some for 200 days, and others for 400 to 600 days. Notably, one ran for over three years; starting in August 1973, it ran for 1,163 days.

Scapa points to the lack of direct evidence that Holdsworth was actually exposed to asbestos from a Scapa dryer felt, noting that neither Holdsworth nor his coworkers could definitively testify to Holdsworth interacting with a known Scapa dryer felt. This is not the test under settled case law. See *Lockwood*, 109 Wn.2d at 247; see also *Morgan*, 159 Wn. App. at 729. While Scapa concedes that direct evidence is not required to establish exposure in asbestos cases, it argues that the circumstantial evidence here is insufficient to establish Holdsworth was exposed to -containing felts. The record openly contradicts

Viewed in the light most favorable to Holdsworth, the record amply evinces his exposure to asbestos from S Scapa supplied 141 asbestos-containing dryer felts to the Camas mill during the years Holdsworth worked on the cleanup crew. 4 Holdsworth testified that he participated in blow downs on every paper machine at the mill, and Crowson testified that Holdsworth machine, every fabric, multi[ple] times. 5 Nearly every paper machine at the

4 Scapa argues that the jury could not reasonably assess the probability that Holdsworth was exposed to any of its 141 asbestos-containing felts without knowing the total number of felts product, considering all the other evidence in the record, that figure was not necessary to establish

a reasonable inference as to exposure. Scapa abandoned this position at oral argument. 5 exposure because it testimony, and was inadmissible lay speculation. 8-10. First, to support its claim that the evidence leads to -containing dryer felts. These felts ran on the



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

various machines for many months to years at a time. Another worker at the mill specifically recalled Holdsworth conducting blow downs on two machines which ran a combined total of 31 of Scapa asbestos-containing dryer felts, with one of those felts running for nearly half the time that Holdsworth was on the cleanup crew. 6

Scapa boldly asserts that this evidence called for speculation and, as a result, the claims should never have been allowed to go to a jury. This position crumbles when considered under the proper legal standard; we need only conclude that it was either substantial evidence to meet the exposure element of , or that reasonable inferences could be drawn therefrom for a jury to determine that the element had been satisfied. See Lockwood, 109 Wn.2d at 243; see also H.B.H., 192 Wn.2d at 162; see also Burnside, 123 Wn.2d at 107-

inconsistent inferences of exposure, Scapa compares participated in every blow down an reasonable inference: Holdsworth regularly participated in blow downs on all of the paper machines at the Camas mill, nearly all of which ran Sc -containing dryer felts. Further, any discrepancies in witness testimony are properly resolved by the jury as it makes credibility determinations and decides what weight to give the evidence presented. Second, the trial court did not err in of Holdsworth during the relevant time period, and his personal knowledge of the blow down

process at the Cam specialized knowledge that would call for particular expertise. 6 Scapa again argues that without knowing the total number of felts used on machine 15, no ratio can be calculated, and without a ratio, the likelihood that Holdsworth encountered an asbestos- 14. Just because the exact ratio of felts is unknown does not mean an inference of exposure is purely speculative: 12 asbestos-containing Scapa felts ran on that machine and one ran for nearly half the time that Holdsworth was working on the cleanup crew. This is sufficient to support a reasonable inference that Holdsworth was exposed to Scapa asbestos-containing felts during the relevant time period. 08; see also Allen v. Asbestos Corp., 138 Wn. App. 564, 573-74, 157 P.3d 406

(2007).



## **Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant**

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

Holdsworth presented more than sufficient evidence from which a jury could decide that he was exposed to asbestos based on both his direct contact with -containing dryer felts when he participated in blow downs and felt replacements, and, what one of his expert witnesses termed, bystander when he was simply working in proximity to blow downs of machines running Scapa asbestos-containing felts.

### **B. Scapa Dryer Felts as a Substantial Factor of**

To establish causation, plaintiffs bringing claims based on asbestos exposure must also show that the exposure proximately caused their injury.

*Mavroudis v. Pittsburgh-Corning Corp.*, 86 Wn. App. 22, 28, 935 P.2d 684 (1997).

As there may be multiple proximate causes in an asbestos case, the plaintiff may establish causation against a defendant even if the plaintiff would have still

*Id.* at 28.

For the relevant exposure to be deemed a proximate cause, plaintiffs need only

*Id.* at

30- *Id.* at 28.

In *Lockwood* the peculiar nature

of asbestos products and the development of disease due to exposure to such products, it is extremely difficult to determine if exposure to a particular defendant's 248.

Accordingly, the court provided a number of factors that should be considered:

(1) plaintiff's proximity to the asbestos product when the exposure occurred and the expanse of the



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

work site where asbestos fibers were released, (2) the extent of time the plaintiff was exposed to the product, and (3) the types of asbestos products to which plaintiff was exposed and the ways in which the products were handled and used.

Berry v. Crown Cork & Seal Co., 103 Wn. App. 312, 323-24, 14 P.3d 789 (2000)

(outlining factors identified in Lockwood, 109 Wn.2d at 248 court

Lockwood, 109 Wn.2d at 249.

Scapa focuses on the second factor 7 to our

analysis contends

- to present specific evidence .

Without such evidence, Scapa maintains the jury had no basis to evaluate the extent of time that Holdsworth was exposed and thus no basis to find that the sothelioma. Again, this

misconstrues the actual legal standard.

In Lockwood, our Supreme Court rejected many of the same arguments

Scapa now presents. 109 Wn.2d at 245-46. Lockwood worked in various

shipyards in the Puget Sound area, overhauling and repairing old vessels. Id. at

237-38. During this time, the defendant, Raymark, manufactured asbestos cloth

7 - Id. at 42. However, Scapa provides no citation besides Lockwood, determining whether there is sufficient evidence of causation. 109 Wn.2d at 248-49. which was used on vessels in the Puget Sound region. Id. at 239. Though

Lockwood never worked directly with the asbestos-containing materials,

sometimes he would work in the same area of the vessel where insulation workers

had removed and installed asbestos insulation. Id. at 238. As a result, Lockwood



## **Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant**

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

was exposed to asbestos. *Id.* at 238-39. Raymark argued there was insufficient evidence establishing that the exposure to its asbestos-containing cloth interacted with any asbestos-containing cloth at work; did not participate in tearing asbestos cloth from any vessel he worked on, yet this was his primary source of exposure; presented no specific or direct evidence that the asbestos-containing cloth he was exposed to was made by Raymark; and could not personally identify *Id.* at 245.

On review, the court held the evidence was sufficient to support a finding of both exposure and proximate cause. *Id.* at 247-48.

Regarding exposure, the court based its determination on the testimony of one former insulator who recalled Raymark asbestos cloth was used on a large testimony that after asbestos dust was released, it drifted in the air and could be *Id.* at 247.

Concerning proximate cause, the c asbestos has the injury. *Id.* at 247-48. Again, e supported by even stronger evidence than that which the Supreme Court found sufficient in Lockwood. In an attempt to distinguish Lockwood, Scapa argues that Lockwood, unlike Holdsworth, 8 As there is no explicit reference to such a theory in the text of Lockwood or its progeny, and because Scapa fails to provide any citation to case law requiring an asbestos plaintiff to expressly raise such a theory, we will disregard the extensive portion of ing devoted



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

to this defense, which was noticeably abandoned by counsel at oral argument. 9

Rather, this court will follow analysis in Lockwood and, under

the CR 50 standard, consider whether the evidence viewed in the light most

favorable to Holdsworth supports a reasonable inference that his exposure to

asbestos-containing dryer felts constituted a substantial contributing

factor to his mesothelioma.

First, as established in the previous section, there is no question that

s asbestos-containing dryer felts were used at the Camas mill while

Holdsworth worked on the cleanup crew, resulting in his exposure to asbestos in

8 es Lockwood, Allen, Berry, and Morgan - -48. 9 uttal a jobsite drift theory, Scapa ultimately did not respond. Wash. Court of Appeals oral argument, Holdsworth v. Scapa Waycross Inc., No. 83564-5-I (Jan. 19, 2023), at 27 min., 40 sec., video recording by TVW, Washington State's Public Affairs Network, <https://tvw.org/video/division-1-court-of-appeals-2023011205/?eventID=2023011205>. Scapa products packaging of dryer felts, and th -

containing dryer felts ran on nearly every machine in the mill during the timeframe

when Holdsworth worked on the cleanup crew. Further, Holdsworth regularly

performed blow downs on every machine in the mill during this period, including a

machine -containing felts for over three years.

Accordingly, there is a reasonable inference that Holdsworth worked directly with

-containing dryer felts. Such direct exposure may have occurred

when Holdsworth personally conducted blow downs on the machines, raked up

and disposed of the dust created by the blow downs, or cut up and replaced dryer

-containing



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

product.

Second, the expert testimony in Lockwood explained the ability of asbestos

fibers to travel in the air and the risk of subsequent inhalation by bystanders; nearly

identical testimony was provided here. Dr. Carl Brodtkin, who specializes in

occupational and environmental medicine, testified that there was potential 10 from various materials at the Camas mill explaining,

Brodtkin testified:

Fibers that become airborne certainly can travel and and workers in a 25-foot radius or sometimes even a 50- or 75-foot radius can

10 inhale those fibers. That's most typical on on crews for which a worker would be a member, where he would be a bystander or she would be a bystander to other crew members.

When asked whether bystander exposure would apply to a situation in which

amosite-containing pipe-covering insul would be a similar situation that we talked about yesterday, to where Mr.

Holdsworth would be in proximity to another paper machine clean-up crew member

doing a blow[] Christopher DePasquale, an industrial

hygienist, also explained the aerodynamics of asbestos fibers, testifying that they

, , When it drops from a height, you might imagine

Thus asbestos to remain in the breathing zon

Accordingly, not only does the evidence lead to a reasonable inference that

asbestos-containing felts, but expert

testimony also established that Holdsworth was further exposed to asbestos from

products even when he was not working specifically with them.



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

Third, as in Lockwood, there was expert testimony that the exposure to

the development of

s mesothelioma. 11

11 Scapa argues that this expert testimony is insufficient to establish that exposure to assessments on asbestos- -48. Scapa is incorrect. Not only does Scapa mischaracterize the holding of Lockwood, but it fails to recognize that this court views the evidence in the light most favorable to Holdsworth. The expert testimony is - was causally related to asbestos exposure as a member of the cleanup crew from

-containing dryer felts during the blow[] down

ounsel asked Brodtkin to clarify his findings:

Q. So to make sure I have followed, was Mr. Holdsworth's exposure to asbestos-containing dryer felts, including Scapa's asbestos- containing dryer felts, a substantial contributing factor towards Mr. Holdsworth's development of mesothelioma?

A. Yes, it was a significant component part of Mr. Holdsworth's cumulative exposure to asbestos, and, as such, was a substantial contributing factor in his development of mesothelioma.

Brodtkin further testified regarding the intensity of exposure during blow downs,

of exposure as high, based on blow downs and cutting felts, he also confirmed that

low levels of exposure can be sufficient to cause mesothelioma stating, brief exposures are certainly attributable in terms of attributing diagnosis of

Defense expert Dr. Richard Kradin, trained as both a

pulmonologist and pathologist, also testified that even low-level exposure to

[s] [Hold

developing mesothelioma.

At oral argument before this court, and in additional authorities submitted

later, Scapa repeatedly asserted that Holdsworth needed to present expert





## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

containing dryer felts in use at the Camas mill during the time he was on the cleanup crew was a substantial factor in his contraction of mesothelioma. medical his disease. 12

Yet again, this is simply not the law. Our Supreme Court expressly

held in Lockwood that evidence of the exposure to , in

all exposure to asbestos has a

support a reasonable inference that the product was a substantial factor in the

disease. 109 Wn.2d at 247-48 (emphasis added).

of purported evidentiary deficiencies and presents examples of how he could have

testified more precisely, it ignores not only the other opinions Brodtkin provided that

do make the requisite causal connection, but also the entirety of the testimony from

experts Kradin and DePasquale that

conclusions. Viewed in the light most favorable to Holdsworth, the evidence clearly

supports contraction of mesothelioma. Wresting a verdict

from the hands of a jury is an extreme remedy and may only be applied where that

verdict Burnside, 123 Wn.2d at

107-08. Because Holdsworth met the evidentiary standard under H.B.H. and

12 s not dispute that the asbestos to which Holdsworth was exposed at the at 25. As explained in section A, -containing dryer felts were among those products to which it concedes Holdsworth was exposed and were the medical cause of his mesothelioma. Further, we are unmoved by the additional authorities Scapa submitted after argument on this theory because, as detailed in this section, expert medical testimony on causation was in fact provided to the jury. Lockwood trial court did not err in denying it

### II. Curative Instruction in Response to Improper Closing Argument

Scapa avers the trial court made an improper, unconstitutional, and



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

that neither reviewable, as Scapa failed to timely object, nor one requiring reversal, as Scapa invited the error. Alternately, Holdsworth contends that even if the instruction was an improper comment on the evidence, the unchallenged jury instructions cured any prejudice.

ge juries with respect

to matters of fact, nor comment thereon, but shall declare the law WASH. CONST.

art. IV, § 16. The purpose of prohibiting judges from commenting on the evidence pinion of the

State v. Hansen, 46 Wn. App. 292, 300, 730 P.2d 706

(1986), aff'd as modified by, 737 P.2d 670 (1987). As a comment on the evidence

violates a constitutional prohibition, a party may raise the issue for the first time on appeal. State v. Lampshire, 74 Wn.2d 888, 893, 447 P.2d 727 (1968).

the court's attitude toward the merits of the case or the court's evaluation relative to a disputed issue Hansen, 46 Wn. App. at 300

(emphasis in original). Scapa argues that the curative instruction here constituted a comment on the evidence based on the latter. At the end of its closing argument,

Scapa made the following statement:

The other thing I would point out to you is consider the evidence. There were some big numbers thrown around. The money being sought here doesn't fit the law. Consider all of the evidence. There is nothing here that supports those numbers. So, again, we would ask you to find for Scapa and check "no" to questions one, three, and five.

But if you believe but if you believe that Scapa was a substantial contributing factor, plaintiffs' experts have conceded that there are many others who aren't here with us at trial who could be considered substantial contributing factors.



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

As Scapa made these concluding comments, it showed the jury a slide containing a chart of the 21 other identified manufacturers of asbestos products present at the Camas mill. Once the jury was excused, Holdsworth objected and requested a Koker 13 instruction. Holdsworth asserted that Scapa had argued for a discount based on the presence of asbestos-containing products of other manufacturers at the Camas mill, which is contrary to Washington law on joint and several liability in asbestos cases. 14 Accordingly, Holdsworth argued that the Koker instruction

13 Koker v. Armstrong Cork, Inc., 60 Wn. App. 466, 484, 804 P.2d 659 (1991). Holdsworth Koker. Id. asbestos-containing products manufactured and sold by companies who are not defendants in this case. If you find for the plaintiff, you are to award the plaintiff full damages, and you are not to speculate as to the method or effect, if any, of allocation of responsibility between the defendant and other parties or entities outside the context of this trial. The [c]ourt will make any appropriate 14 In asbestos cases, each defendant may be held jointly and severally liable for the full amount of damages suffered by the plaintiff. RCW 4.22.030, .070(3). to allude to any sort of damage reduction argument, despite the fact that the

challenged language immediately followed a direct reference to the damages sought by Holdsworth.

Koker instruction,

are all

to remind the jury that the lawyers' remarks and statements are not evidence and to disregard the last statement regarding substantial contributing factors and others as they consider any any potential damages (Emphasis added.)

The record suggests that the parties accepted this proposed instruction.

When the jury returned, the court provided the following instruction:



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

Before I turn it over to [Holdsworth] for rebuttal; one thing I want you to know, as I've told you in the written instructions, that the lawyers' remarks and statements are not evidence. The evidence are those exhibits that I have admitted into the case and the testimony of witnesses. You are to disregard any statements or remarks by the lawyers that are inconsistent with the evidence or inconsistent with the law as I've given it to you. There was a statement regarding substantial contributing factor and whether other if Scapa was a substantial contributing factor and other entities at the at the mill were substantial contributing factors. You're to disregard that statement.

After Holdsworth presented rebuttal closing argument, the court thanked and

excused the jury; deliberations were set to begin the following morning. Just after the jurors signed off of the remote platform for the day, Scapa raised its concern

Scapa disagreed for rebuttal closing argument, and the language that was used was slightly different than what was indicated before we went on the record. It was not couched in the context of damages, and I fear that it could be potentially be misleading that the jury was instructed to disregard substantial factor causation.

Rather than requesting any specific recourse

Relying on *In re Adoption of M.S.M.-P.*, Holdsworth first argues that this

court need not address this issue because Scapa failed to timely object to the

curative instruction. 184 Wn.2d 496, 358 P.3d 1163 (2015). However, the

assertion regarding timeliness is contradicted by the record, which clearly shows

Scapa objected before deliberations began. The court had an opportunity to cure

any error, therefore the objection was timely.

error doctrine, a party may not set up an error at trial and then complain of it on

*Lavigne v. Chase, Haskell, Hayes & Kalamon, P.S.*, 112 Wn. App. 677,

voluntary action that induces the trial court to take an action that a party later

*Casper v. Esteb Enterprises, Inc.*, 119 Wn. App. 759, 771,

82 P.3d 1223 (2004) (citing *Lavigne*, 112 Wn. App. at 681). Relying on *Casper*,



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

Holdsworth contends that Scapa cannot chal in 119 Wn. App. 759. In Casper, a corporate defendant refused to provide certain answers in its

defendant by binding it to those responses at trial. Id. at 764-66. However, during

trial, the corporate representative repeatedly attempted to violate the order

restricting testimony. Id. at 765-66. Accordingly, when the representative was

Id. The corporation appealed, arguing that the trial

on the evidence. Id. at 770. Division Two of this court statements likely did constitute comme invited the error. Id. at 771. Unlike the defendant in Casper, Scapa did not violate

a court order, let alone repeatedly, to the point that the trial court had no choice

credibility. Although Holdsworth contends that Scapa intended to make an

improper argument to the jury, and the argument contrary to law coupled with the

slide containing the names of all 21 other manufacturers involved in the case is

a rise to the level of inviting the alleged error. Accordingly, we will reach the merits

on this issue.

When Scapa raised this argument in its CR 59 motion for a new trial, the

judge a statement that [Scapa] had just made, literally, just a few minutes before I sent the jury out. There can be no confusion. I mean, there would be no confusion by

it told the jury to disregard arguments by the parties that were inconsistent with the

law, it never told them to disregard other jury instructions with respect to proximate

cause.

a

that statement without limiting it to the consideration of damages as



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

it had proposed to the parties, instruction directed the jury to disregard all statements about substantial

berations as

Can any clarification be made on how damages are handled? Our understanding is that we are to come up with 2 numbers: damages to Kevin [sic] (the estate) and damages to Sherrie.

Is it the case that the amount should be the total damage inflicted by Kevin's [sic] disease, not the portion that we believe Scapa to be responsible for and that determining the amount from that which Scapa would be responsible for is a separate process?

from the jury does not lead to such an

effective than intended, it does not suggest an inference that the jury disregarded

.

Scapa relies on State v. Levy, which is distinguishable. 156 Wn.2d 709,

714, 132 P.3d 1076 (2006). There, Levy sought reversal of various criminal

convictions on the ground that multiple jury instructions constituted judicial

comments on the evidence. Id. at 714. The jury instructions for burglary in the Id. at 716. These were both questions of

fact for the jury to decide. Id. at 721-22. Accordingly, as the instructions conveyed

to the jury that these issues of fact had been established as a matter of law, the

court held that this language in the instructions constituted comments on the

evidence. Id. at 721.

Here, unlike in Levy, the trial court did not instruct the jury on any question

of fact as if it were settled as a matter of law. Rather, the trial court told the jury to

other if Scapa was a substantial contributing factor and other entities at the



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

Far from taking an essential element away from the jury, the trial court here took one errant statement away that had already properly and, when considered in context, arguably contradicted the law on joint and several liability in asbestos cases.

Holdsworth relies on *Hizey v. Carpenter* in arguing that the trial court's comment did not constitute a comment on the evidence. 119 Wn.2d 251, 830 P.2d 646

(1992). After *Hizey* finished closing argument, but before the jury was discharged, the court's comment, which was a comment on the evidence, is a difficult area of the law.

*Id.* at 270. On

review, our Supreme Court determined this was not a comment on the evidence.

*Id.* at 271. First, the court simply stated that the comment was proximate to the evidence.

*Id.* Second, the court explained that the comment was a comment on the evidence, which the jury was duly instructed to disregard.

*Id.* (emphasis omitted). Third, the court noted that the jury was instructed to disregard the comment.

Instruction 1, in which the jury was informed that the law prohibits the trial court from commenting on the evidence and that any such comment must be disregarded. *Id.* The court concluded that the comment was a comment on the evidence.

*Id.* The court concluded that the comment was a comment on the evidence.

improper, the jury instruction to disregard the comment cured any error. *Id.* Here, as in

*Hizey*, the attempted curative instruction was directed at a statement in closing

argument, which the jury was instructed was not evidence, and the written

instructions told the jury to entirely disregard any judicial comment on the evidence.

Scapa attempts to distinguish *Hizey* on the grounds that the instruction there was

not issue specific and had no potential effect of eliminating a disputed issue.



## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

However, Scapa fails to recognize that the challenged instruction here also did not have the potential effect of eliminating a disputed issue to the contrary.

Even assuming, without so deciding,

constituted an improper comment on the evidence, any such error was harmless.

In our analysis of improper judicial comments, the

has been accepted by Levy comment is presumed prejudicial and is only not prejudicial if the record

Id. at 725. However, we

also presume that the jury follows the instructions of the trial court. Bordynoski v.

Bergner, 97 Wn.2d 335, 342, 644 P.2d 1173 (1982). Accordingly, even when a trial court makes an improper comment, the error may be cured by a jury instruction

to disregard any comments on the evidence. Hizey, 119 Wn.2d at 271.

Here, written nstruction No. 1 expressly told the jury to disregard such

comments:

The law does not permit me to comment on the evidence in any way. I would be commenting on the evidence if I indicated my personal opinion about the value of testimony or other evidence. Although I have not intentionally done so, if it appears to you that I have indicated my personal opinion, either during trial or in giving these instructions, you must disregard it entirely.

to

disregard one statement which appeared to have been addressing consideration

of damages

of causation is plainly unrealistic. No reasonable person could conclude that the

trial court was telling the jury that the crucial issue of causation had been decided

as a matter of law. However, even assuming such an interpretation was initially





## Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

any prejudice. As the trial court

to disregard one statement made by Scapa at closing argument; the jury was never told to disregard the written jury instructions it was provided concerning proximate cause. Those instructions were precisely the explicit legal framework which allowed Scapa to argue its theory of the case. Consistent with the directive set out in article IV, section 16 of our state constitution, the judge declared the law by providing proper, and unchallenged, instructions as to the role of the jury as the sole trier of fact, to disregard any statements by the judge it may perceive as comments on the evidence, and that set out the element of proximate cause as a Because we presume jurors will follow the

instructions of the court, any purported error here would have been cured by the other instructions provided, as occurred in Hizey.

Holdsworth presented sufficient evidence to prove his exposure to asbestos asbestos-containing dryer felts and that the exposure was a substantial factor to his development of mesothelioma, by way of both lay and expert testimony. Even without relying upon reasonable inferences in we decline to disturb it. Further, Scapa has failed to demonstrate that the challenged curative instruction resulted in prejudice that was not remedied by the other instructions provided by the court. Accordingly, the trial court did not err in or its motion for a new trial.



## **Sherrie D. Holdsworth, Respondent V. Scapa Waycross, Inc., Appellant**

2023 | Cited 0 times | Court of Appeals of Washington | April 17, 2023

Affirmed.

WE CONCUR:

