

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
THIRD DEPARTMENT

Matter of Murad v. Tri-State Groundwater Solutions, LLC

2026 NY Slip Op 01825 · No. CV-24-1227 · Decided March 26, 2026

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, Third Department affirmed a Workers' Compensation Board decision disallowing Andrew Murad's claim for workers' compensation benefits based on an alleged occupational disease involving osteoarthritis in his knees. The court held that substantial evidence supported the Board's finding that the medical evidence did not establish a recognizable causal link between Murad's knee condition and his work activities.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Third Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Garry, P.J.; Arons, J.; Ceresia, J.; Fisher, J.; Mackey, J.
JURISDICTION	New York Appellate Division, Third Department
DECIDED	March 26, 2026
DOCKET	CV-24-1227
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Claimant appealed from a Workers' Compensation Board decision disallowing his claim for workers' compensation benefits based on an alleged occupational disease affecting his knees.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Board's determination whether a medical condition constitutes an occupational disease is reviewed for substantial evidence and will not be disturbed when supported by substantial evidence, even if the record contains evidence supporting a contrary result.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published New York Appellate Division opinion
PARTIES	Andrew Murad v. Tri-State Groundwater Solutions, LLC, MLJ Contracting Corp., Halmar International, Inc., State Insurance Fund, Pristine Services, Inc., Starr Indemnity & Liability, Ferreira Construction Co., Inc., Workers' Compensation Board

TOPICS

workers compensation

standard of review

appellate procedure

employment law

PRACTICE AREAS

workers compensation

employment law

administrative law

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether substantial evidence supported the Workers' Compensation Board's determination that claimant failed to establish a recognizable link between his knee condition and a distinctive feature of his employment.
2. Whether claimant's medical evidence established a probable, rationally based causal relationship rather than merely a possible connection between his work and his alleged occupational disease.

HOLDINGS

1. The Board properly disallowed the claim because claimant failed to establish a recognizable link between his knee condition and a distinctive feature of his employment, and substantial evidence supported that determination.
2. Claimant's medical proof was insufficient because it identified only a possible causal connection and did not establish a probable causal relationship supported by a rational basis.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To establish an occupational disease, the claimant must demonstrate a recognizable link between his or her condition and a distinctive feature of his or her employment, and the Board's decision as to whether to classify a certain medical condition as an occupational disease is a factual determination that will not be disturbed if supported by substantial evidence, even where there is record evidence that could support a contrary result” ([*1])

“medical proof is relied upon to demonstrate the existence of a causal relationship, it must signify a probability of the underlying cause that is supported by a rational basis and not be based upon a general expression of possibility” ([*1])

“substantial evidence supports the Board's determination that claimant did not establish that [he] sustained a causally-related occupational disease” ([*2])

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Andrew Murad worked over the years as a maintenance foreperson and heavy equipment mechanic for various companies. He alleged that repetitive work-related movements caused or aggravated osteoarthritis in his knees. His treating orthopedic surgeon, Omid Barzideh, could state only that a causal connection was possible, acknowledged that he did not know the cause of Murad's arthritis, and could not identify the specific work activities that allegedly aggravated the condition. Another orthopedic surgeon, Mark Harper, opined that the knee degeneration was not causally related to Murad's work and that any work-related exacerbation would be speculative.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Murad applied for workers' compensation benefits in 2021, alleging that work-related repetitive movement worsened osteoarthritis in his knees. After physician depositions and hearings involving claimant and other witnesses, a Workers' Compensation Law Judge disallowed the claim, finding that claimant's treating physician had not credibly established the required causal connection. The Workers' Compensation Board affirmed, and the Appellate Division affirmed the Board's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Matter of Morgan v Kinray, Inc., 226 AD3d 1288, 1289-1290 [3d Dept 2024]
- Matter of Kretunski v Citywide Envtl. Servs. LLC, 233 AD3d 1218, 1218-1219 [3d Dept 2024]
- Matter of Lichten v New York City Tr. Auth., 132 AD3d 1219, 1219 [3d Dept 2015]
- Matter of Sanchez v New York City Tr. Auth., 206 AD3d 1428, 1429, 1430 [3d Dept 2022]
- Matter of Glowczynski v Suburban Restoration Co., Inc., 174 AD3d 1236, 1238 [3d Dept 2019]
- Matter of Bonet v New York City Tr. Auth., 205 AD3d 1287, 1288-1289 [3d Dept 2022]
- Matter of Simpson v New York City Tr. Auth., 151 AD3d 1160, 1161-1162 [3d Dept 2017]

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

Matter of Murad v Tri-State Groundwater Solutions, LLC (2026 NY Slip Op 01825) Matter of Murad v Tri-State Groundwater Solutions, LLC 2026 NY Slip Op 01825 Decided on March 26, 2026 Appellate Division, Third Department Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431. This opinion is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports.

Decided and Entered:March 26, 2026 CV-24-1227 [*1]In the Matter of the Claim of Andrew Murad, Appellant, v Tri-State Groundwater Solutions, LLC, et al., Respondents. Workers' Compensation Board, Respondent. Calendar Date:February 11, 2026 Before:Garry, P.J., Aarons, Ceresia, Fisher and Mackey, JJ. The Perecman Firm, PLLC, New York City (Edward W. Guldi of counsel), for appellant.

Chartwell Law, New York City (Marissa J. Huber of counsel), for Tri-State Groundwater Solutions, LLC and another, respondents. Cherry, Edson & Kelly, LLP, Melville (David W. Faber of counsel), for MLJ Contracting Corp. and another, respondents. Santacrose, Frary & Whiting, Buffalo (Shannon L. Spencer of counsel), for Halmar International, Inc. and another, respondents.

David F. Wertheim, State Insurance Fund, Albany (Gabriel Colon of counsel), for State Insurance Fund, respondent. Gerber Ciano Kelly Brady LLP, Buffalo (Stanley L. Evans of counsel), for Pristine Services, Inc. and another, respondents. Goldberg Segalla, Rochester (Bradford J. Reid of counsel), for Starr Indemnity & Liability, respondent. Vecchione, Vecchione & Cano, LLP, Garden City Park (Michael F. Vecchione of counsel), for Ferreira Construction Co., Inc. and another, respondents.

Garry, P.J. Appeal from a decision of the Workers' Compensation Board, filed June 10, 2024, which disallowed claimant's claim for workers' compensation benefits. Claimant, a union member who worked as a maintenance foreperson and as a heavy equipment mechanic for various companies over the years, applied for workers' compensation benefits in 2021 and claimed that he had sustained an occupational disease due to osteoarthritis in his knees worsened by work-related repetitive movement.

Following the taking of deposition testimony from two physicians who had treated or examined claimant and hearings at which claimant and others testified, a Workers' Compensation Law Judge disallowed the claim upon finding that claimant's treating physician had not credibly testified to the requisite link between claimant's knee problems and his work. Upon administrative review, the Workers' Compensation Board affirmed.

Claimant appeals. We affirm. "To establish an occupational disease, the claimant must demonstrate a recognizable link between his or her condition and a distinctive feature of his or her employment, and the Board's decision as to whether to classify a certain medical condition as an occupational disease is a factual determination that will not be disturbed if supported by substantial evidence, even where there is record evidence that could support a contrary result" (*Matter of Morgan v Kinray, Inc.*, 226 AD3d 1288, 1289-1290 [3d Dept 2024] [internal quotation marks and citations omitted]; see *Matter of Kretunski v Citywide Envtl.*

Servs. LLC, 233 AD3d 1218, 1218-1219 [3d Dept 2024]). Where, as here, "medical proof is relied upon to demonstrate the existence of a causal relationship, it must signify a probability of the underlying cause that is supported by a rational basis and not be based upon a general expression of possibility" (*Matter of Lichten v New York City Tr. Auth.*, 132 AD3d 1219, 1219 [3d Dept 2015]; see *Matter of Sanchez v New York City Tr.*

Auth., 206 AD3d 1428, 1429 [3d Dept 2022]). Claimant's treating physician, orthopedic surgeon Omid Barzideh, consistently failed to render a definitive opinion that claimant's arthritic knees were connected to his work activities. Barzideh only suggested that such a link was "possible" in a November 2021 report. When asked during a later deposition if a causal relationship existed between claimant's knee condition and his work activities, Barzideh could only reply "yes and no" and offer claimant's work as one of a number of possible explanations.

In fact, Barzideh admitted that he "d[id no]t know what the cause of [claimant's] arthritis" was and that the deterioration of that condition could have resulted from a variety of things other than work, including claimant's age, physical condition and a fall and separate twisting injury sustained in 2021 that the record gave no reason to believe were work related.

Barzideh also failed to explain what work activities he believed had exacerbated claimant's condition, testifying [*2]that he was "not exactly sure" what claimant's work as a "[h]eavy vehicle mechanic" involved and did not believe that he had been given a list of claimant's specific work duties.

The Board was free to, and did, "reject as inadequate [this] less-than-compelling medical evidence submitted by claimant" (*Matter of Glowczynski v Suburban Restoration Co., Inc.*, 174 AD3d 1236, 1238 [3d Dept 2019] [internal quotation marks and citations omitted]; see *Matter of Bonet v New York City Tr. Auth.*, 205 AD3d 1287, 1288-1289 [3d Dept 2022]).

The Board noted that the other medical evidence in the record offered no support for a connection between claimant's work and his condition. Indeed, the Board pointed out that Mark Harper, an orthopedic surgeon who had reviewed Barzideh's notes and other medical records and examined claimant himself in October 2022, specifically opined that the degenerative joint disease in claimant's knees was not causally-related to his work and that the available information only permitted speculation as to whether work exacerbated that condition.

Thus, in the absence of credible medical evidence establishing a recognizable link between claimant's knee condition and his work, "substantial evidence supports the Board's determination that claimant did not establish that [he] sustained a causally-related occupational disease" (*Matter of Sanchez v New York City Tr. Auth.*, 206 AD3d at 1430; see *Matter of Bonet v New York City Tr.*

Auth., 205 AD3d at 1288-1289; *Matter of Simpson v New York City Tr. Auth.*, 151 AD3d 1160, 1161-1162 [3d Dept 2017]). Claimant's remaining contentions have been examined and are lacking in merit. Aarons, Ceresia, Fisher and Mackey, JJ., concur. ORDERED that the decision is affirmed, without costs.