

Department of Health and Human Services
DEPARTMENTAL APPEALS BOARD
Civil Remedies Division

Center for Tobacco Products,
Complainant

v.

Meyers Fuel Mart Inc.
d/b/a Meyer's Fuel Mart / Exxon,
Respondent

FDA Docket No. FDA-2015-H-4517
CRD Docket No. T-17-407

Decision No. TB868

Date: February 22, 2017

INITIAL DECISION AND DEFAULT JUDGMENT

Found:

- 1) Respondent violated 21 U.S.C. § 331, specifically 21 C.F.R. 1140.14(a), and 1140.14(b)(1) as charged in the complaint; and
- 2) Respondent violated 21 U.S.C. § 331, specifically 21 C.F.R. 1140.14(a), 1140.14(b)(1), and 1140.14(d) as charged in the prior complaint; and
- 3) Respondent committed five violations in a 36-month period as set forth hereinabove.
- 4) Respondent is hereby assessed a civil penalty in the amount of \$5,000.

Glossary:

ALJ	Administrative Law Judge ¹
CMP	civil money penalty
CTP/Complainant	Center for Tobacco Products
DJ	Default Judgment

¹ See 5 C.F.R. § 930.204.

FDCA	Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (21 U.S.C.A. Chap. 9)
DN	UPS Delivery Notification
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
HHS	Dept. of Health and Human Services
OSC	Order to Show Cause
POS	UPS Proof of Service
SOP	Service of Process
Respondent	Meyers Fuel Mart Inc. d/b/a Meyer's Fuel Mart / Exxon
TCA	The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, Pub. L. No. 111-31, 123 Stat. 1776 (2009)(TCA)

I. JURISDICTION

I have jurisdiction to hear this case pursuant to my appointment by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and my authority under the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. §§ 554-556), 5 U.S.C.A. § 3106, 21 U.S.C. § 333(f)(5), 5 C.F.R.

§§ 930.201 et seq. and 21 C.F.R. Part 17.²

II. PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

The Center for Tobacco Products (CTP/Complainant) filed a Complaint dated December 7, 2015, alleging that FDA documented five violations within a 36- month period.

Meyers Fuel Mart Inc. d/b/a Meyer's Fuel Mart / Exxon (Respondent or Meyer's Fuel Mart / Exxon) was served with process on December 15, 2015 by United Parcel Service. Respondent filed an Answer dated January 8, 2016. On April 25, 2016, I issued

² See also *Butz v. Economou*, 438 U.S. 478 at 513, 98 S.Ct. 2894, 57 L.Ed.2d 895 (1978); *Marshall v. Jerrico, Inc.*, 446 U.S. 238 (1980); *Federal Maritime Com'n v. South Carolina State Ports Authority*, 535 U.S. 743, 744 (2002).

a Procedural Order setting a schedule for filings and procedures, which I modified by my Order Granting Complainant's Request for Reconsideration of May 11, 2016. Pursuant to my orders, CTP served Respondent's counsel with a Request for Production of Documents on July 26, 2016. Respondent had until August 25, 2016 to provide responsive documents or to file a motion for a protective order. Respondent failed to comply with my orders and schedule for proceedings. CTP filed a Motion to Compel Discovery and a Motion to Extend Deadlines in which CTP averred that Respondent failed to comply with its request for production of documents. On October 7, 2016, I issued an Order Granting Motion for Continuance and Request to Extend Deadlines and Order to Show Cause (OSC) to Respondent, in which I ordered Respondent to show cause on before October 17, 2016, why I should not issue a judgment of default in favor of CTP pursuant to 21 C.F.R. § 17.11.

On December 23, 2016, CTP filed a Motion to Impose Sanctions against Respondent asserting that Respondent did not respond to its request for production of documents or to my OSC. In its motion, CTP asked that I strike Respondent's Answer and issue a Default Judgment against Respondent as a sanction for failure to comply with my orders.

On February 7, 2017, I issued a second OSC, in which I provided Respondent until February 14, 2017, to show cause why I should not enter default judgment against it as an appropriate sanction pursuant to 21 C.F.R. § 17.35(b)-(f).

To date, Respondent has failed to respond.

Pursuant to 21 C.F.R. § 17.35(a), I may sanction a person, including any party or

counsel for:

- (1) Failing to comply with an order, subpoena, rule, or procedure governing the proceeding;
- (2) Failing to prosecute or defend an action; or
- (3) Engaging in other misconduct that interferes with the speedy, orderly, or fair conduct of the hearing.

In this case, Respondent failed to comply with my orders and procedures governing this proceeding.

III. STRIKING RESPONDENT'S ANSWER

Respondent failed to comply with my April 25, 2016 Procedural Order, failed to respond to my October 7, 2016 OSC, failed to respond to CTP's December 23, 2016 Motion to Impose Sanctions, and failed to respond to my February 7, 2017 OSC. In fact, Respondent has not made any contact with this Court since Respondent's January 8, 2016 Answer.

Due to Respondent's noncompliance, I am striking Respondent's Answer, issuing this default decision, and assuming the facts alleged in CTP's complaint to be true.

21 C.F.R. §§ 17.35(c)(3), 17.11(a). The harshness of the sanctions I impose upon either party must relate to the nature and severity of the misconduct or failure to comply. *See* 21 C.F.R. § 17.35(b). Respondent failed to comply with my April 25, 2016 Procedural Order, my October 7, 2016 OSC, and my February 7, 2017 OSC.

I find and conclude Respondent's repeated failure to comply with my orders

sufficiently egregious to warrant striking the answer and issuing a decision without further proceedings. 21 C.F.R. §§ 17.35(c)(3), 17.11(a).

IV. BURDEN OF PROOF

The Center for Tobacco Products (CTP/Complainant) as the petitioning party has the burden of proof. 21 C.F.R. § 17.33.

V. LAW

21 U.S.C. § 331, specifically 21 C.F.R. §§ 1140.14(a) and 1140.14(b)(1).

VI. ISSUE

Did Respondent violate 21 U.S.C. § 331, specifically 21 C.F.R. §§ 1140.14(a) and 1140.14(b)(1) as alleged in the complaint?

VII. DEFAULT

I find Respondent was served and is subject to the jurisdiction of this forum, as established by the UPS Delivery Notification filed by CTP.

Striking Respondent's Answer leaves the Complaint unanswered.

My October 7, 2016 OSC and February 7, 2017 OSC are incorporated herein by reference.

My October 7, 2016 OSC instructed Respondent to show cause on or before close of business on October 17, 2016, why Judgment of Default (DJ) should not be entered in favor of the Complainant pursuant to 21 C.F.R. § 17.11.

Respondent failed to file any pleading in response to my October 17, 2016 OSC.

My February 7, 2017 OSC instructed Respondent to show cause on or before close of business on February 14, 2017, why I should not strike Respondent's Answer as a sanction and enter DJ in favor of the Complainant pursuant to 21 C.F.R. § 17.35.

Respondent failed to file any pleading in response to my October 7, 2016 OSC or February 7, 2017 OSC. Pursuant to 21 C.F.R. § 17.35(c)(3), I struck Respondent's Answer as a sanction.

It is Respondent's right to participate in the legal process.

It is Respondent's right to request a hearing or to waive a hearing.

By failing to file a response pleading, I find Respondent waived its right to a hearing pursuant to 21 C.F.R. § 17.11(b).

VIII. ALLEGATIONS

A. Agency's recitation of facts

CTP alleged that Respondent owned an establishment, doing business under the name Meyer's Fuel Mart / Exxon, located at 12711 West 8 Mile Road, Detroit, Michigan 48235. Respondent's establishment received tobacco products in interstate commerce and held them for sale after shipment in interstate commerce.

During a two-part inspection of Meyer's Fuel Mart / Exxon conducted on August 26, 2015, and September 2, 2015, an FDA-commissioned inspector documented the following violations:

- a. Selling tobacco products to a minor, in violation of 21 C.F.R. § 1140.14(a).

Specifically, a person younger than 18 years of age was able to purchase a

package of Newport Box cigarettes on August 26, 2015, at approximately 1:40 PM; and

- b. Failing to verify the age of a person purchasing tobacco products by means of photographic identification containing the bearer's date of birth, as required by 21 C.F.R. § 1140.14(b)(1). Specifically, the minor's identification was not verified before the sale, as detailed above, on August 26, 2015, at approximately 1:40 PM.

B. Respondent's recitation of facts

I struck Respondent's January 8, 2016 Answer.

Accordingly, Respondent filed no responsive pleadings that I may consider.

IX. PRIOR VIOLATIONS

On April 13, 2015, CTP initiated a previous civil money penalty action, CRD Docket Number C-15-1946, FDA Docket Number FDA-2015-H-1108, against Respondent for three³ violations of 21 C.F.R. pt. 1140 within a 24- month period. CTP alleged those violations to have occurred at Respondent's business establishment, 12711 West 8 Mile Road, Detroit, Michigan 48235, on August 7, 2013, and November 14, 2014.

³ An FDA-commissioned inspector documented one violation on August 7, 2013 for the sale of individual cigarettes (21 C.F.R § 1140.14(d)) and two violations on November 14, 2014, for the sale of tobacco products to a minor (21 C.F.R § 1140.14(a)) and failure to verify the age of the person purchasing tobacco products (21 C.F.R § 1140.14(b)).

The previous action concluded when the administrative law judge (ALJ) entered an Initial Decision and Default Judgment on June 5, 2015, finding that the violations alleged in the complaint established Respondent's liability under the Act.

I find and conclude Respondent committed five violations of 21 U.S.C. § 331, specifically 21 C.F.R. §§ 1140.14(a), 1140.14(b)(1), and 1140.14(d) within a 36-month period as set forth in the Complaint.

X. FAMILY SMOKING PREVENTION AND TOBACCO CONTROL ACT

The "relevant statute" in this case is actually a combination of statutes and regulations: The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, Pub. L. No. 111-31, 123 Stat. 1776 (2009) (TCA), amended the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (21 U.S.C.A. Chap. 9) (FDCA) and created a new subchapter of that Act that dealt exclusively with tobacco products, (21 U.S.C. §§ 387-387u), and it also modified other parts of the FDCA explicitly to include tobacco products among the regulated products whose misbranding can give rise to civil, and in some cases criminal, liability. The 2009 amendments to the FDCA contained within the TCA also charged the Secretary of Health and Human Services with, among other things, creating regulations to govern tobacco sales. The Secretary's regulations on tobacco products appear in Part 1140 of title 21, Code of Federal Regulations.

Under the FDCA, "[a] tobacco product shall be deemed to be misbranded if, in the case of any tobacco product sold or offered for sale in any State, it is sold or distributed in violation of regulations prescribed under section 387f(d)." 21 U.S.C. § 387c(a)(7)(B)

(2012). Section 387 a-1 directed FDA to re-issue, with some modifications, regulations previously passed in 1996. 21 U.S.C. § 387 a-1(a)(2012). These regulations were passed pursuant to section 387f(d), which authorizes FDA to promulgate regulations on the sale and distribution of tobacco products; 75 Fed. Reg. 13,225 (March 19, 2010), codified at 21 C.F.R. Part 1140 (2015); 21 U.S.C. § 387f(d)(1) (2012). Accordingly, 21 C.F.R. 1140.1(b) provides that “failure to comply with any applicable provision in this part in the sale, distribution, and use of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco renders the product misbranded under the act.”

Under 21 U.S.C. § 331(k), “[t]he alteration, mutilation, destruction, obliteration, or removal of the whole or any part of the labeling of, or the doing of any other act with respect to, a food, drug, device, tobacco product, or cosmetic, if such act is done while such article is held for sale (whether or not the first sale) after shipment in interstate commerce and results in such article being adulterated or misbranded” is a prohibited act under 21 U.S.C. § 331. Thus, when a Retailer such as Respondent misbrands a tobacco product by violating a requirement of 21 C.F.R. Part 1140, that misbranding in turn violates the FDCA, specifically 21 U.S.C. § 331(k). FDA may seek a civil money penalty from “any person who violates a requirement of this chapter which relates to tobacco products.” 21 U.S.C. § 333(f)(9)(A) (2012). Penalties are set by 21 U.S.C. § 333 note and 21 C.F.R. § 17.2. Under current FDA policy, the first time FDA finds violations of 21 C.F.R. Part 1140 at an establishment, FDA only counts one violation regardless of the number of specific regulatory requirements that were actually violated, but if FDA finds violations on subsequent occasions, it will count violations of specific

regulatory requirements individually in computing any civil money penalty sought. This policy is set forth in detail, with examples to illustrate, at *U.S. Food & Drug Admin., Guidance for Industry and FDA Staff, Civil Money Penalties and No-Tobacco-Sale Orders for Tobacco Retailers, Responses to Frequently Asked Questions (Revised) (2015)*, available at <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/TobaccoProducts/Labeling/RulesRegulationsGuidance/UCM447310.pdf> [hereinafter *Guidance for Industry*], at 13-15. So, for instance, if a retailer sells a tobacco product on a particular occasion to a minor without checking for photographic identification, in violation of 21 C.F.R. §§ 1140.14(a) and (b)(1), this will count as two separate violations for purposes of computing the civil money penalty, unless it is the first time violations were observed at that particular establishment. This policy of counting violations has been determined by the HHS Departmental Appeals Board to be consistent with the language of the FDCA and its implementing regulations, *see CTP v. Orton Motor Company*, Departmental Appeals Board Decision number 2717 of June 30, 2016.

XI. LIABILITY

When a retailer such as Respondent is found to have “misbranded” a tobacco product in interstate commerce, it can be liable to pay a CMP. 21 U.S.C. §§ 331, 333. A retailer facing such a penalty has the right, set out in statute, to a hearing under the Administrative Procedure Act (21 U.S.C. § 333(f)(5)(A)). A retailer can forfeit its

rights under the statute and regulations by failing to participate in the process, a failure known as a “default” (21 C.F.R. § 17.11).

As set forth above, it is Respondent’s right to decide whether to participate in the legal process. It is Respondent’s right to decide to request a hearing and it is Respondent’s right to waive a hearing.

I find Respondent, by failing to respond, waived its right to a hearing.

XII. IMPACT OF RESPONDENT’S DEFAULT

When a Respondent defaults by failing to answer the complaint, or respond to a OSC, an ALJ must assume as true all factual allegations in the complaint and issue an initial decision within thirty (30) days of the answer’s due date, imposing “the maximum amount of penalties provided for by law for the violations alleged” or “the amount asked for in the complaint, whichever is smaller” if “liability under the relevant statute” is established (21 C.F.R. § 17.11(a)(1) and (2)). *But see* 21 C.F.R. § 17.45 (initial decision must state the “appropriate penalty” and take into account aggravating and mitigating circumstances).

Two aspects of Rule 17.11 are important in default cases.

First, the Complainant benefits from a regulatory presumption (the ALJ shall assume that the facts alleged in the complaint are true) that relieves it from having to put on evidence:

The presumption affords a party, for whose benefit the presumption runs, the luxury of not having to produce specific evidence to establish the point at issue. When

the predicate evidence is established that triggers the presumption, the further evidentiary gap is filled by the presumption. *See* 1 Weinstein's Federal Evidence § 301.02[1], at 301-7 (2d ed.1997); 2 McCormick on Evidence § 342, at 450 (John W. Strong ed., 4th ed. 1992). *Routen v. West*, 142 F.3d 1434, 1440 (Fed. Cir. 1998).⁴

Second, as far as the penalty is concerned, my discretion is limited by the language of the regulation. I may not tailor the penalty to address any extenuation or mitigation, for example, nor, because of notice concerns, may I increase the penalty beyond the smaller of (a) the Complainant's request or (b) the maximum penalty authorized by law.

XIII. LIABILITY UNDER THE RELEVANT STATUTE

Taking the CTP's allegations as set forth in the complaint as true, the next step is whether the allegations make out "liability under the relevant statute" (21 C.F.R. § 17.11(a)).

Based on Respondent's failure to answer I assume all the allegations in the complaint to be true.

⁴ However, when the opposing party puts in proof to the contrary of that provided by the presumption, and that proof meets the requisite level, the presumption disappears. *See Texas Dept. of Community Affairs v. Burdine*, 450 U.S. 248, 254–55, 101 S.Ct. 1089, 1094–95, 67 L.Ed.2d 207 (1981); *A.C. Aukerman*, 960 F.2d at 1037 (“[A] presumption ... completely vanishes upon the introduction of evidence sufficient to support a finding of the nonexistence of the presumed fact.”); *see also* Weinstein's Federal Evidence § 301App.100, at 301App.–13 (explaining that in the “bursting bubble” theory once the presumption is overcome, then it disappears from the case); 9 Wigmore on Evidence § 2487, at 295–96 (Chadbourn rev.1981). *See generally* Charles V. Laughlin, In Support of the Thayer Theory of Presumptions, 52 Mich. L.Rev. 195 (1953). *Routen v. West*, 142 F.3d 1434 (1998) at 1440.

I find and conclude that the evidentiary facts, by a preponderance of the evidence standard, support a finding Respondent violated 21 U.S.C. § 331, specifically 21 C.F.R. § 1140.14(a)⁵ in that a person younger than 18 years of age was able to purchase cigarettes on August 26, 2015.

I find and conclude that the evidentiary facts, by a preponderance of the evidence standard, support a finding Respondent violated 21 U.S.C. § 331, specifically 21 C.F.R. § 1140.14(b)(1) on the same date in that Respondent also violated the requirement that retailers verify, by means of photo identification containing a purchaser's date of birth, that no cigarette purchasers are younger than 18 years of age.

The conduct set forth above on August 26, 2015, counts as two violations under FDA policy for purposes of computing the civil money penalty. *See Guidance for Industry*, at 13-15.

XIV. PENALTY

There being liability under the relevant statute, I must now determine the amount of penalty to impose. My discretion regarding a penalty is constrained by regulation. I must impose either the maximum amount permitted by law or the amount requested by the Center, whichever is lower. 21 C.F.R. § 17.11(a)(1), (a)(2).

In terms of specific punishments available, the legislation that provides the basis for assessing civil monetary penalties divides retailers into two categories: those that

⁵ On August 8, 2016, the citations to certain tobacco violations changed. Because the violations in this case occurred before the citations were changed, I cite only to the regulations as they appeared prior to implementation. For more information see: <https://federalregister.gov/a/2016-10685>.

have “an approved training program” and those that do not. Retailers with an approved program face no more than a warning letter for their first violation; retailers without such a program begin paying monetary penalties with their first. TCA § 103(q)(2), 123 Stat. 1839, *codified at* 21 U.S.C. § 333 note. *See* 21 C.F.R. § 17.2. The FDA has informed the regulated public that “at this time, and until FDA issues regulations setting the standards for an approved training program, all applicable CMPs will proceed under the reduced penalty schedule.” FDA Regulatory Enforcement Manual, Aug 2015, ¶ 5-8-1. Because of this reasonable exercise of discretion, the starting point for punishments and the rate at which they mount are clear – the lower and slower schedules.

XV. MITIGATION

Because Respondent is found to be in default I am required to impose the maximum amount of penalties provided for by law for the violations alleged.

Therefore, no mitigation is considered.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Respondent committed five violations in a 36-month period and so, Respondent is liable for a civil money penalty of \$5,000. *See* 21 C.F.R. § 17.2.

WHEREFORE, evidence having read and considered it be and is hereby ORDERED as follows:

- a. I find Respondent has been served with process herein and is subject to this forum.
- b. I find Respondent failed to respond to my October 7, 2016 and February 7, 2017 orders to show cause.

- c. I strike Respondent's January 8, 2016 Answer as a sanction pursuant to 21 C.F.R. §§ 17.35(c)(3).
- d. I find Respondent is in default.
- e. I assume the facts alleged in the complaint to be true.
- f. I find the facts set forth in the complaint establish liability under the relevant statute.
- g. I assess a monetary penalty in the amount of \$5,000.

/s/
Richard C. Goodwin
U.S. Administrative Law Judge