

The mcdonald's scalding coffee case

Law, Common Law



The McDonald's Scalding Coffee Case is a case for compensatory and punitive damages filed by a 79-year-old woman, Stella Liebeck, who suffered from third degree burns as a result of spilled McDonald's coffee on her body. The jury awarded Liebeck with \$200, 000 in compensatory damages and \$2. 7 million in punitive damages. These amounts were later reduced, but the general conclusion is that McDonald's was severely punished for serving very hot coffee that led to serious injury.

McDonald's coffee is scalding because it is maintained at 180 to 190 degrees Fahrenheit to maintain optimum taste. The temperature of McDonald's is glaringly high compared to the normal temperature of coffee when prepared at home, which is only about 135 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Despite this fact, the case is worth revisiting because there are certain arguments worth pursuing, which could lessen or remove entirely the liability of McDonald's.

It should be remembered that coffee should naturally be served hot, unless the customer asked for other types of coffee, which should be served cold. Therefore, while companies such as McDonald's have certain responsibilities to their consumers, the latter also have responsibility to their own selves, particularly in ensuring that they would exercise diligence in their handling or consumption of purchased food. In the case described above, it is clear that Liebeck did not exercise due diligence in her handling of the coffee.

With full knowledge that the coffee was hot, she placed the Styrofoam cup containing the coffee between her knees. She should have exercised more prudence considering that she was sitting in a car and she placed the cup between her knees, both circumstances contributing to the lack of stability to

the cup. Moreover, Liebeck did not consider that she was already old and her body is no longer in top shape. She should have exercised more care in her actions to prevent any kind of injury.

References

American Association for Justice. McDonald's Scalding Coffee Case. Retrieved February 5, 2008

Lectric Law Library. The Actual Facts About The McDonald's' Coffee Case.

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