

Case brief

Parties:

Liebeck v. McDonald's Restaurants.

Facts:

Stella Liebeck, a 79-year old woman from Albuquerque in New Mexico, bought a cup of coffee at McDonald's drive-in restaurant. She opened the cup of coffee and placed between her legs. She spilled the cup all over her lower body and she suffered third-degree burns on this part of body.

Legal issue

Legal issue is whether McDonalds is responsible for the claimant's injuries or not.

Procedural history:

Stella Liebeck tried to settle out-of-court, but all of these attempts failed. After this, Liebeck sued the McDonald's for gross negligence.

Reasoning of the court:

Served coffee was very hot (82-88 °C), this temperature causes third-degree burns in two to seven seconds. Very important documents were more than 700 reports of people burned by McDonald's coffee.

The jury decided that Liebeck is responsible for 20% and McDonald's is responsible for 80%, despite the fact that on the cup of coffee was warning sign, that this beverage was hot. According to the court, this sign was too small. Liebeck was awarded \$200 000 in compensatory damages and \$2.7 million in punitive damages. These damages were later reduced.

Both parties appealed against this decision. Later, parties decided to settle out-of-court and they agreed on damages less than \$600 000.