

FILED
SUPREME COURT
STATE OF WASHINGTON
10/21/2024 1:14 PM
BY ERIN L. LENNON
CLERK

Case #: 1035632

No. _____

SUPREME COURT OF WASHINGTON

APPEAL FROM

Court of Appeals Division III No. 393151

Re: Ferry County Superior Court No. 20-1-00020-10

STATE OF WASHINGTON,
Respondent/Plaintiff,

v.

JOHN HENRY SLIGER,
Petitioner/Defendant.

PETITION FOR REVIEW

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF AUTHORITIESii

APPENDICESiv

IDENTITY OF PETITIONER 1

COURT OF APPEALS DECISION..... 1

ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW 1

STATEMENT OF THE CASE 3

ARGUMENT WHY REVIEW SHOULD BE ACCEPTED 9

CONCLUSION..... 17

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Cases

<i>City of Sunnyside v. Fernandez</i> , 59 Wn. App. 578, 581-82, 799 P.2d 753 (1990)	13,14, 16
<i>Jametsky v. Olsen</i> , 179 Wn.2d 756, 762, 317 P.3d 1003 (2014)	10, 11
<i>Kilian v. Atkinson</i> , 147 Wn.2d 16, 20, 50 P.3d 638 (2002).....	11
<i>Pope Res., LP v. Wash. State Dep't of Natural Res.</i> , 197 Wn. App. 409, 418, 389 P.3d 699 (2016) (quoting WEBSTER'S II NEW COLLEGE DICTIONARY 51 (1999)).....	12
<i>Protect the Peninsula's Future v. Growth Mgmt. Hr'gs Bd.</i> , 185 Wn. App. 959, 972, 344 P.3d 705 (2015).....	10,11
<i>State v. Engel</i> , 166 Wn.2d 572, 579, 210 P.3d 1007 (2009)	16
<i>Weyerhaeuser Company v. Department of Ecology</i> , 86 Wn.2d 310, 315, 545 P.2d 5 (1976).....	10

Statutes

RCW 46.61.506	7
RCW 46.61.506(3).....	15
RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)	11
RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii)	7, 12, 13

RCW 46.61.506(4)(b)..... 12

Court Rules

RAP 13.4(b)..... 9

RAP 13.4(b)(1)-(4) 9

Other

RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY 749 (2d ed. 1987) 13

WEBSTER’S II NEW COLLEGE DICTIONARY 51 (1999) 12

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Court of Appeals' decisionA1-12

APPENDIX B: Order Denying Petitioner's Motion for
Reconsideration of that Decision..... B1

A. IDENTITY OF PETITIONER

John Henry Sliger asks this court to accept review of the Court of Appeals decision terminating review designated in Part B of this petition.

B. COURT OF APPEALS DECISION

A copy of the Court of Appeals' decision is in the Appendix (APP) at pages A1-12. A copy of the order denying petitioner's motion for reconsideration of that decision at APP B-1.

C. ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

1. Did the appellate court err by finding that the statutory prima facie evidence standard for admitting the results of a Draegar breath alcohol test, which requires that "[t]he person being tested did not have any foreign substances ... in his ... mouth at the beginning of the fifteen-minute observation period" has been met when, despite the test-taker's denial of foreign material in his mouth, the officer administering the test

personally observed tobacco in the defendant's mouth and expressly identifies it as a foreign substance?

2. Did the appellate court err in finding that the statutory prima facie evidence standard for admitting the results of a Draegar breath alcohol test, which requires that "[t]he person being tested did not have any foreign substances ... in his ... mouth at the beginning of the fifteen-minute observation period" has been met when the agency regulation instructs the officer administering the test that "[a] determination as to whether a subject has a foreign substance in his ... mouth will be made by either an examination of the mouth or a denial by the person that he ... has any foreign substances in their mouth" and the test-taker denies having a foreign substance in his mouth, despite the actual presence of what the officer administering the test observes as the presence of what he expressly identifies as a foreign substance?

D. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On April 26, 2020, Mr. Sliger was involved in a side-by-side versus dirt bike collision on Lake Ellen Road in Ferry County, Washington.¹ Later, his friend, the other party involved in the collision, ultimately succumbed to his injuries. Mr. Sliger agreed to take a field sobriety test, which included a portable breath test. Prior to taking the breath test, Mr. Sliger had chewing tobacco in his mouth but complied with the deputy's instruction to spit it out at the scene prior to taking the portable breath test. Deputy Kahns arrested Mr. Sliger and transported him to the Stevens County Jail.

At the jail, Mr. Sliger agreed to provide a Draeger breath test. Contemporaneous with the Draeger test, Deputy Kahns documented his observations in his Washington State DUI Arrest Report as illustrated by the image below. CP at 35.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the facts are distilled from the court's findings of fact and conclusions of law, CP 90-94, as well as the record from the Court of Appeals.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> At the time of this test(s), I was certified to operate the DRAEGER ALCO TEST 9510 and possessed a valid permit issued by the State Toxicologist.		
DO YOU HAVE ANY FOREIGN SUBSTANCE IN YOUR MOUTH? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	MOUTH CHECKED? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	ANY FOREIGN SUBSTANCES FOUND? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO EXPLAIN: TINY TOBACCO STRANDS STUCK IN TEETH REMOVED? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO
Date: 4/26/2020 Time of Mouth Check: 21:45		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I observed the subject from the time of the mouth check through the completion of the breath test.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The subject did not vomit, eat, drink, smoke, or place any foreign substance in his/her mouth during the observation time.		
<input type="checkbox"/> At the time of this test, I possessed a valid permit issued by the State Toxicologist and was certified to operate the PBT. The test was performed in accordance with the State Toxicologist's protocols. (Chapter 448-15 WAC)	PBT READING 0.131	PBT TIME 20:54

The report form required that specific factors be documented. First, the form directs the officer to ask the test taker, ***“Do you have any foreign substance in your mouth?”*** Deputy Kahns checked the box to indicate ***“no”***. Next, the deputy is asked if the test-taker’s, ***“Mouth checked?”*** The box is checked ***“yes”***.

Finally, the form requires that the officer indicate if ***“Any foreign substances found?”*** The box is checked ***“yes”***. A subpart instructs the officer to ***“Explain”*** on the line provided. Deputy Kahns elaborated ***“TINY TOBACCO STRANDS STUCK IN TEETH”***. Another subpart asks if the substance was ***“Removed?”***. The box is checked ***“no”***.

Mr. Sliger submitted to the test, which indicated an alcohol level over the legal limit.

The State charged Mr. Sliger with vehicular homicide. Mr. Sliger moved for suppression of the Draeger test results on the basis that the test was improperly performed where Mr. Sliger had a foreign substance in his mouth 15 minutes prior to the test.

After an evidentiary hearing with State witness testimony the trial court orally denied the motion to suppress, but did not enter a written order at that time. CP 79.

Mr. Sliger moved for reconsideration of the oral ruling and for entry of findings of fact and conclusions of law. CP 62-77. The trial court then entered an order denying Mr. Sliger's suppression motion and noting that the findings of fact, conclusions of law, and an order would follow. On the same day, the court entered an order denying the motion for reconsideration, again indicating that findings and conclusions would be forthcoming.

Mr. Sliger then filed a notice of discretionary review to protect his right to appeal. A commissioner of this Court held a hearing on this matter and because the findings and conclusions had not yet been presented to the superior court, ruled that the current record in front of the court was insufficient to determine whether discretionary review was warranted. The proceedings were stayed pending the filing findings of fact and conclusions of law and filing of the transcripts of oral proceedings.

The superior court later entered the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law (FFCL) Regarding Defendant's Motion to Suppress Draeger Results. CP 90-94. The court found in part:

2. At the scene of the arrest, Mr. Sliger had chewing tobacco in his mouth but removed it at the scene prior to transport to the Stevens County Jail. CP at 90 (emphasis added).

....

6. Prior to the breath test, Deputy Kahns asked Mr. Sliger if he had any substances in his mouth and Mr. Sliger said "no".

7. Prior to the breath test, Deputy Kahns checked Mr. Sliger's mouth for foreign substances. He noted tiny strands of tobacco between Mr. Sliger's

teeth. Tobacco is a foreign substance, but the tobacco strands were not removed.

8. The mouth check consisted of looking into Mr. Sliger's mouth and asking Mr. Sliger to move his cheeks and lips so that Deputy Kahns could look inside Mr. Sliger's mouth

CP at 90-93.

The court concluded in part:

5. WAC 448-16-040 (1) states in relevant part:

A determination as to whether a subject has a foreign substance in his or her mouth will be made by either an examination of the mouth or a denial by the person that he or she has any foreign substances in their mouth. A test mouthpiece is not considered a foreign substance for purposes of RCW 46.61.506.

RCW 46.61.506 (4)(a)(iii) requires the officer administering the breath test to determine whether a subject has a foreign substance in his or her mouth. The WAC provides that the determination may be made by either by an examination of the subject's mouth or by a subject's denial that he or she has any foreign substance in their mouth.

6. The statutory test for admissibility requires strict compliance. Deputy Kahns asked Mr. Sliger if he had any foreign substances in his mouth and received a denial. The State has met the burden of providing prima facie evidence that Mr.

Sliger did not have any foreign substances in his mouth at the beginning of the fifteen-minute observation period, based solely on Mr. Sliger's denial that he had any foreign substances in his mouth. Therefore, the Draeger BAC results are admissible at trial.

CP at 93.

The Commissioner granted the motion for discretionary review and the matter was set for a hearing by a panel.

Following briefing and a hearing on the merits, the panel filed an unpublished opinion. *State v. Sliger*, No. 39315-1-III, 2024 WL 3617255 (Aug. 1, 2024); A1-12. The panel determined:

We conclude that the evidence and the law support a distinction between a lump of chewing tobacco and tiny strands of tobacco for purposes of determining admissibility of a breath test.

APP A10.

In so holding, the panel determined that Mr. Sliger removed the chewing tobacco from his mouth to the extent that it was insufficient to corrupt the results of the Draeger breath

alcohol test. APP A11-12. Mr. Sliger's motion to reconsider was denied. APP B1.

Mr. Sliger now petitions this Court for review of the Court of Appeals' decision.

E. ARGUMENT WHY REVIEW SHOULD BE ACCEPTED

Pursuant to RAP 13.4(b), considerations for acceptance of review before this court include:

- (1) If the decision of the Court of Appeals is in conflict with a decision of the Supreme Court; or
- (2) If the decision of the Court of Appeals is in conflict with a published decision of the Court of Appeals; or
- (3) If a significant question of law under the Constitution of the State of Washington or of the United States is involved; or
- (4) If the petition involves an issue of substantial public interest that should be determined by the Supreme Court.

RAP 13.4(b)(1)-(4).

This case is grounded in the interpretation of the statute to establish prima facie evidence for the admissibility of

Draeger breath alcohol test results. This implicates an issue of substantial public interest that should be determined by this Court.

When interpreting statutes enacted by our legislature, the court determines and gives effect to the legislature's intent. *Jametsky v. Olsen*, 179 Wn.2d 756, 762, 317 P.3d 1003 (2014). It is only when the statute is not clear or otherwise ambiguous, the interpretation of the agency charged with administering the statute is a factor to be used by a court in its interpretation of the meaning of the statute. *Weyerhaeuser Company v. Department of Ecology*, 86 Wn.2d 310, 315, 545 P.2d 5 (1976).

When interpreting a statute, the court first looks to the plain language of the statute. *Jametsky*, 179 Wn.2d at 762. "When the legislature has expressed its intent in the plain language of a statute, we cannot substitute our judgment for the legislature's judgment." *Protect the Peninsula's Future v. Growth Mgmt. Hr'gs Bd.*, 185 Wn. App. 959, 972, 344 P.3d 705 (2015). To assess the meaning of the plain language, the

court considers the text of the statutory provision in question, the context of the statute in which the provision is found and related statutes. *Protect the Peninsula's Future*, 185 Wn. App. at 972. If the plain meaning of a statute is unambiguous, the court must apply that plain meaning as an expression of legislative intent without considering extrinsic sources. *Jametsky*, 179 Wn.2d at 762. The court will not add language to an unambiguous statute under the guise of interpretation. *Kilian v. Atkinson*, 147 Wn.2d 16, 20, 50 P.3d 638 (2002).

The criteria for the admissibility of breath test evidence is set forth in RCW 46.61.506(4)(a). The statute requires that a breath test performed with an instrument approved by the state toxicologist is admissible at trial if the State “produces prima facie evidence” of eight testing requirements. The statutory requirement at issue is:

[t]he person being tested did not have any foreign substances, not to include dental work or piercings, fixed or removable, in his or her mouth at the beginning of the fifteen-minute observation period[.]

RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii).

“‘Prima facie evidence’ is evidence of sufficient circumstances that would support a logical and reasonable inference of the facts sought to be proved.” RCW 46.61.506(4)(b). In the analysis, the court “is to assume the truth of the prosecution’s ... evidence and all reasonable inferences from it in a light most favorable to the prosecution[.]” RCW 46.61.506(4)(b).

At issue is whether the statutory term “any foreign substance” includes the “tiny strands of tobacco” observed by Deputy Kahns. RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii); App. at 39.

First, we will examine the statutory term “any”. Our courts have already defined this term in the context of this situation. “‘Any is defined as ‘[o]ne or some, regardless of sort, quantity, or number’; ‘[a]ny quantity or part’; and ‘[t]o any degree or extent.’” *Pope Res., LP v. Wash. State Dep’t of Natural Res.*, 197 Wn. App. 409, 418, 389 P.3d 699 (2016) (quoting WEBSTER’S II NEW COLLEGE DICTIONARY 51 (1999)).

Applying the term to the evidence, “tiny strands” is noted in the plural and were observed with the human eye by the deputy as having a physical, discernable form upon examination by the deputy. These “tiny strands” are is clearly included in the definition, be it one or some strands, without regard to the sort, quantity or size of the strands.

Next, we examine the statutory term “foreign substance.” RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii). This Court has determined its meaning in the context of interpreting the law relative to foreign substances and a challenge to a former BAC statute in *City of Sunnyside v. Fernandez*, 59 Wn. App. 578, 581-82, 799 P.2d 753 (1990). The *Fernandez* court adopted the dictionary definition of “foreign substance” as meaning “‘belonging to or proceeding from other persons or things ... not belonging to the place or body where found[.]’” *Fernandez*, 59 Wn. App. at 581 (quoting RANDOM HOUSE DICTIONARY 749 (2d ed. 1987)).

In *Fernandez*, the defendant had his own blood in his mouth, which this Court held is not a “foreign substance”.

Fernandez, 59 Wn. App. at 582. The court held, “[o]ne’s blood does belong to the person or body where it is found.”

Fernandez, 59 Wn. App. at 582. Conversely, it cannot be disputed that tobacco *does not* belong to or proceed from Mr. Sliger’s body.

The Court of Appeals determined that the foreign substance at issue must necessarily affect the results of the breath test to defy the prima facie test of admissibility. But that is not what the statute proscribes.

Additionally, the Court of Appeals considered the agency’s regulation regarding the manner in which the person administering the test should determine the presence of foreign substance:

A determination as to whether a subject has a foreign substance in his or her mouth will be made by either an examination of the mouth or a denial by the person that he or she has any foreign substances in their mouth.

WAC 448-16-040(1).

The Court of Appeals essentially found, as did the trial court, that the either/or language left the person administering the test to select the result based on whichever discovery method the test administrator deemed appropriate. However, that is not the statutory test that declares that is required for admissibility of the test results.

The prima facie evidence statute granted the administrative agency charged with collecting the sample authority limited to test administrator's credentials:

Analysis of the person's blood or breath to be considered valid under the provisions of this section ... shall have been *performed according to methods approved by the state toxicologist and by an individual possessing a valid permit issued by the state toxicologist for this purpose*. The state toxicologist is directed to approve satisfactory *techniques or methods, to supervise the examination of individuals to ascertain their qualifications and competence to conduct such analyses*, and to issue permits which shall be subject to termination or revocation at the discretion of the state toxicologist.

RCW 46.61.506(3) (emphasis added).

The statute only directly addresses the competence of the person administering the breath test. While there is some indistinct mention of the methodology regarding the performance of the test itself, it is limited to the determination of the presence of a foreign substance by the test administrator's examination of the mouth or the test-taker's denial of the presence of a foreign substance in the mouth. In any event, construing the regulation to permit the presence of a foreign substance to the whims of the test administrator's either/or determination would surely lead to an absurd result, which is not permitted under the rules of interpreting either statute or a regulation. *See State v. Engel*, 166 Wn.2d 572, 579, 210 P.3d 1007 (2009).

Notably, the statute does not establish what may constitute a foreign substance. Again, that was resolved by *Fernandez*, 59 Wn. App. 578, addressed above.

Moreover, the trial court found and Mr. Sliger did not object to the finding that “[t]obacco is a foreign substance” and the “tobacco strands were not removed.” CP at 91. And Deputy Kahns himself identified the tobacco as a foreign substance and that he did not remove it. CP at 35.

Regardless of whether the agency’s regulation has any influence on the interpretation of the statute, the statute and the trial court’s findings leads to the inevitable result of inadmissibility of the Draeger breath test result.

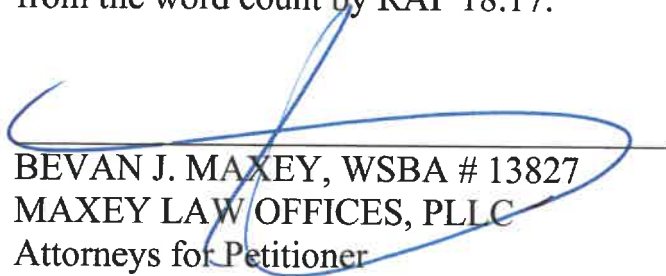
Regardless of the method employed to determine whether anything is present, its presence cannot be denied once observed and described. The court erred by denying suppression.

F. CONCLUSION

Pursuant to the facts as found by trial court and relevant authority, this Court should accept Mr. Sliger’s petition for review.

Dated: October 21, 2024.

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excluding the parts of the document exempted
from the word count by RAP 18.17.



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PETITION FOR REVIEW

APPENDIX A

Court of Appeal's Decision pages 1-12

STATE OF WASHINGTON,
Respondent/Plaintiff,

v.

JOHN HENRY SLIGER,
Petitioner/Defendant.

APPEAL FROM
Court of Appeals Division III No. 393151
Re: Ferry County Superior Court No. 20-1-00020-10

FILED
AUGUST 1, 2024
In the Office of the Clerk of Court
WA State Court of Appeals, Division III

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON
DIVISION THREE

STATE OF WASHINGTON,)	
)	No. 39315-1-III
Respondent,)	
)	
v.)	
)	
JOHN HENRY SLIGER,)	UNPUBLISHED OPINION
)	
Petitioner.)	

STAAB, A.C.J. — John Sliger is charged with vehicular homicide. At the scene of the accident Sliger removed a lump of chewing tobacco from his mouth. Prior to taking a breath test, when asked if he had any foreign substances in his mouth, he answered no. After checking his mouth, the officer noted strands of tobacco in his teeth that were not removed prior to taking the test. Sliger filed a pretrial motion to suppress the breath test results.

For a breath test to be admissible under RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii), the State must produce prima facie evidence that the subject did not have any foreign substances in their mouth at the beginning of the observation period. This burden can be met with evidence that either the subject denied having anything in their mouth or evidence that a check of the mouth revealed no foreign substances. Here, the trial court found that tobacco was a foreign substance, that Sliger removed the tobacco from his mouth before taking the test,

but did not remove the strands of tobacco between his teeth. Based on Sliger's denial of a foreign substance, the trial court concluded that the State met its burden of producing prima facie evidence that Sliger did not have a foreign substance in his mouth at the beginning of the observation period.

We affirm. An officer can rely on a subject's denial so long as the officer is not otherwise aware of the presence of a foreign substance. Here, Sliger denied having any foreign substances in his mouth, and when the officer checked, he did not see any foreign substances. He did see strands of tobacco but did not consider them to be a foreign substance. Nor did the trial court find that strands of tobacco were a foreign substance. Thus, the trial court did not err in concluding that Sliger's denial was prima facie evidence that he did not have any foreign substances in his mouth. As the trial court noted, admissibility is different from validity, and Sliger can still use evidence of the tobacco strands to challenge the validity of the test at trial.

BACKGROUND

The admissibility of a breath test is governed by case law, statute, and regulations. Specifically, RCW 46.61.506(4)(a) requires the State to produce prima facie evidence of certain facts before a test can be admitted as evidence. One of the facts is evidence that the person being tested "did not have any foreign substances, not to include dental work or piercings, fixed or removable, in his or her mouth at the beginning of the fifteen-minute observation period." RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii).

On April 26, 2020, John Henry Sliger was involved in a dirt bike collision. Deputy Mitchell Kahns was the officer dispatched to the scene. Once at the scene, Deputy Kahns began asking Sliger questions about the incident, and Sliger admitted he had consumed alcohol a few hours before the crash. Deputy Kahns noted that Sliger had chewing tobacco in his mouth, but testified that Sliger took it out at the scene. After a preliminary investigation, Deputy Kahns placed Sliger under arrest for driving while under the influence and transported him to jail.

Once they arrived at the jail, Deputy Kahns began preparations to administer the Draeger Breath Alcohol Test. Deputy Kahns asked Sliger if Sliger had anything in his mouth, to which Sliger responded no. Deputy Kahns then checked Sliger's mouth and noted tiny strands of tobacco left in between a few of Sliger's teeth. He later characterized it as "debris." Rep. of Proc. (RP) at 33. When asked if he saw any foreign substances in Sliger's mouth, Deputy Kahns testified no. He indicated that he made note of the tobacco strands in his report because "they were there," but did not have Sliger remove the strands before administering the test.¹ RP at 19.

¹ In his narrative report, Deputy Kahns indicated that he did not observe any foreign substances in Sliger's mouth, but in his DUI report, Deputy Kahns checked the box "yes" on whether any foreign substances were found and then provided an explanation: "tiny tobacco strands stuck in teeth." CP at 35. During the motion to suppress, Deputy Kahns testified that he did not believe, based on his training, that tobacco strands qualified as a foreign substance, but wanted to make a note of the strands so he checked the "yes" box on whether there were foreign substances.

Sliger filed a motion to suppress the results of the breath test, arguing that the State would not be able to meet the foundational requirements for admission. In addition to the arresting officer, the State called Trooper John Axtman, a breath test technician and instructor. Trooper Axtman testified that it was important for the machine to measure alcohol from the lungs, rather than mouth alcohol. One way to ensure that there is no mouth alcohol is to ask the suspect if they have anything in their mouth and then check the mouth for foreign substances. In addition, the machine's slope detector tests for mouth alcohol. If the slope detector rises too quickly, then mouth alcohol is present and the machine will register an invalid sample.

The prosecutor then asked Trooper Axtman about the effects of tobacco on the test:

[Prosecutor] —is chewing tobacco before the 15 minutes and they remove it, are you gonna have any concerns with, you know, if they don't brush their teeth before they do the test?

[Axtman]: If they removed it, no. Now, if they didn't remove it then, yeah, I'd have some heartache on it if they left a lump of tobacco in there.

[Prosecutor]: Okay. And you just now said a lump of tobacco. If somebody's got, you know, some flecks on their teeth, is that going to cause you the same heartache as a lump of tobacco?

[Axtman]: No, it's not. I used to chew. And sometimes it can be difficult to get those little tiny grits out of your teeth, even after rinsing it. So, again, you do the best with what you have.

....

[Prosecutor]: Would you consider, you know, having a piece of bread stuck between your teeth or a piece of tobacco flake on your teeth to be foreign substances that would render this invalid, an invalid sample?

[Axtman]: I'd have no—I'd have no concerns with the breath test. With, again, with very small amounts like that.

[Prosecutor]: Uh-huh.

[Axtman]: Now, again, if there were large amounts I would have a concern.

[Prosecutor]: Okay. What do you consider a large amount?

[Axtman]: Well, for tobacco purposes, a lump of tobacco in there.

[Prosecutor]: Okay. Why is that?

[Axtman]: Because it technically is a foreign substance.

[Prosecutor]: Okay. But what is it about having that in there that's going to affect the breath test?

[Axtman]: There's case—there's case studies showing that—if you really want me to get into it I can get into the case studies -- but showing the effects or lack of for the breath testing. But, again, the—the—the big lump, that's something that the officer should have removed.

[Prosecutor]: Okay.

[Axtman]: For the breath testing.

[Prosecutor]: Okay.

[Axtman]: So I would not be okay if that was left in there.

RP at 49-51. On cross-examination, Trooper Axtman acknowledged that if a suspect denied having anything in their mouth, but the officer knew otherwise, the officer would be required to remove the foreign substance.

Following this testimony, the trial court denied the motion to suppress. The court concluded that the State had introduced prima facie evidence that Sliger did not have any

foreign substances in his mouth based on Sliger's denial. It explained that evidence that strands of tobacco remained between Sliger's teeth could be used at trial to challenge the validity of the test. Following the hearing, the court entered the following relevant findings and conclusions:

[FOF] 2. At the scene of the arrest, Mr. Sliger had chewing tobacco in his mouth but removed it at the scene prior to transport to the Stevens County Jail.

[FOF] 6. Prior to the breath test, Deputy Kahns asked Mr. Sliger if he had any substances in his mouth and Mr. Sliger said "no."

[FOF] 7. Prior to the breath test, Deputy Kahns checked Mr. Sliger's mouth for foreign substances. He noted tiny strands of tobacco between Mr. Sliger's teeth. Tobacco is a foreign substance, but the tobacco strands were not removed.

....

[COL] 6. The statutory test for admissibility requires strict compliance. Deputy Kahns [sic] asked Mr. Sliger if he had any foreign substances in his mouth and received a denial. The State has met the burden of providing prima facie evidence that Mr. Sliger did not have any foreign substances in his mouth at the beginning of the fifteen-minute observation period, based solely on Mr. Sliger's denial that he had any foreign substances in his mouth. Therefore, the Draeger BAC results are admissible at trial.

Clerk's Papers (CP) at 90-91, 93.

Our commissioner granted Sliger's petition for discretionary review. On appeal, Sliger challenges finding of fact 2 and conclusion of law 6.

ANALYSIS

This case boils down to whether strands of tobacco in a suspect's teeth constitute a foreign substance that must be removed before administering a breath test. Sliger appeals the trial court's denial of his motion to suppress the breath test result, arguing that the State failed to meet its burden of showing the test was admissible under RCW 46.61.506(4)(a). In particular, Sliger challenges the trial court's finding that he removed the tobacco in his mouth prior to the test and the court's conclusion that his denial of having anything in his mouth was sufficient to meet the State's burden of showing that "the person tested did not have any foreign substances . . . in his or her mouth." Appellant's Br. Appendix at 31. He contends that the finding and conclusion are inconsistent with the finding that strands of tobacco remained in between his teeth.

Written findings entered after a CrR 3.6 suppression hearing will be upheld if they are supported by substantial evidence in the record. *State v. Hill*, 123 Wn.2d 641, 644, 870 P.2d 313 (1994). Evidence is considered "substantial" if it is "sufficient to persuade a fair-minded, rational person of the truth of the finding." *State v. Mendez*, 137 Wn.2d 208, 214, 970 P.2d 722 (1999). Conclusions of law are reviewed de novo. *State v. Garvin*, 166 Wn.2d 242, 249, 207 P.3d 1266 (2009).

Construction of a statute is a question of law reviewed de novo. *State v. Engel*, 166 Wn.2d 572, 576, 210 P.3d 1007 (2009). When interpreting a statute, our "fundamental objective is to ascertain and give effect to the legislature's intent."

No. 39315-1-III
State v. Sliger

Lenander v. Dep't of Ret. Sys., 186 Wn.2d 393, 405, 377 P.3d 199 (2016). Where the language of a statute is clear, the legislature's intent will be derived from the plain language of the statute. *Engel*, 166 Wn.2d at 578. When a term is not defined, we may result to the common law definition. *Id.* at 578-79. We should avoid an interpretation that produces an absurd result. *Id.* at 579.

When the government moves to admit the results from a breath test, it must produce prima facie evidence that the criteria set forth in RCW 46.61.506(4) have been met. "For purposes of this section, 'prima facie evidence' is evidence of sufficient circumstances that would support a logical and reasonable inference of the facts sought to be proved." RCW 46.61.506(4)(b). Moreover, in assessing whether the foundational evidence is sufficient, the court is required to assume the truth of the government's evidence and construe reasonable inferences in favor of the government. *Id.* Once the foundational requirements are met and the test results are admitted, a defendant may attack the test results in a particular case by challenging the reliability or validity of the results. *City of Seattle v. Allison*, 148 Wn.2d 75, 80, 59 P.3d 85 (2002).

RCW 46.61.506(4)(a) sets forth eight criteria that the State must show for a breath test to be admissible. For purposes of this appeal, the only contested criteria is whether the State has produced prima facie evidence that "[t]he person being tested did not have *any foreign substances . . .* in his or her mouth at the beginning of the fifteen-minute observation period." RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii) (emphasis added).

In conformity with the requirements of RCW 46.61.506(3), the state toxicologist has adopted regulations that provide the approved methods for administering the breath test. The regulations provide two alternative methods for determining if a foreign substance is present:

A determination as to whether a subject has a foreign substance in his or her mouth will be made by either an examination of the mouth or a denial by the person that he or she has any foreign substances in their mouth.

WAC 448-16-040(1). This methodology does not require or guarantee complete accuracy. Instead, if interference is detected, or if the test records an invalid sample, the testing must start over after determining that the subject does not have foreign substances in their mouth. WAC 448-16-040(2), (3).

While the regulations only require the officer to use one method for determining the absence of a foreign substance, here Officer Kahns employed both methods. Nothing in the regulations precludes the use of both methods. On appeal, defense counsel admits that if the deputy had only asked Sliger about foreign substances, without checking his mouth, then Sliger's negative answer would have been sufficient to meet the requirement of WAC 448-16-040. Appellant's Br. at 16. But Sliger argues that because the deputy also checked his mouth, and observed strands of tobacco, the evidence does not support the trial court's finding that Sliger had removed the tobacco from his mouth, and the trial court erred in concluding that the deputy could rely on Sliger's answer.

We agree that an officer who is aware that a subject has a foreign substance in their mouth cannot ignore this information even if a subject denies having anything in their mouth. The BAC technician who testified at the motion to suppress agreed with this. In this respect, the court's conclusion, that Sliger's denial was sufficient to meet the State's burden, is correct so long as Deputy Kahns was not otherwise aware of a foreign substance in Sliger's mouth.

Sliger does not challenge the trial court's finding that tobacco is a foreign substance, but he does challenge the court's finding that Sliger removed the tobacco from his mouth because strands of tobacco remained. We conclude that the evidence and the law support a distinction between a lump of chewing tobacco and tiny strands of tobacco for purposes of determining admissibility of a breath test.

The trial court's findings distinguished between tobacco and strands of tobacco. While the court found that tobacco was a foreign substance, and this substance had been removed, the court did not find that strands of tobacco would qualify as a foreign substance. The court's distinction between tobacco and tiny strands of tobacco for purposes of finding a foreign substance is supported by the evidence.² Not only did the technician testify that strands of tobacco would not adversely affect the test, but he also

² While it would have been helpful if the court had made an explicit finding that strands of tobacco did not constitute a foreign substance, "where a trial court does not make a finding of fact, we presume a finding against such fact." *Recreational Equip., Inc. v. World Wrapps Nw., Inc.*, 165 Wn. App. 553, 565, 266 P.3d 924 (2011).

testified that if the substance were of sufficient quantity to retain mouth alcohol, the machine would invalidate the test. Deputy Kahns testified that he did not believe the strands of tobacco to be a foreign substance.

Regardless of the court's findings, Sliger contends that RCW 46.61.506(4)(a)(iii) requires the State to produce prima facie evidence that the subject did not have any foreign substance in his mouth at the beginning of the observation period. His argument focuses on the word "any" without attempting to define a "foreign substance."

A "foreign substance" is defined as a substance that "adversely affect[s] the accuracy of test results." *City of Sunnyside v. Fernandez*, 59 Wn. App. 578, 582, 799 P.2d 753 (1990). This definition leaves room for a substance such as tobacco to be considered a foreign substance based on the amount of the substance present. In other words, tobacco only becomes a foreign substance when it is present in an amount sufficient to adversely affect the test. Reading the statute otherwise would lead to absurd results. If we were to hold that the presence of any amount of a substance that is foreign to the mouth renders a test inadmissible, then in theory the microscopic presence of any such substance would impact admissibility. Such a result is not required by the regulations or the statute.


The trial court's finding that Sliger had removed the foreign substance, tobacco, from his mouth is supported by the evidence. Because Deputy Kahns was not otherwise aware of any other foreign substances, the trial court did not err in concluding that

No. 39315-1-III
State v. Sliger

Sliger's denial was prima facie evidence that he did not have any foreign substances in his mouth.

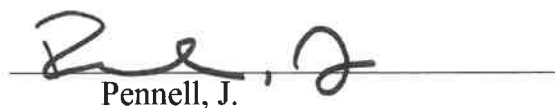
We affirm the trial court's denial of Sliger's motion to suppress the results of the breath test and remand for further proceedings.

A majority of the panel has determined this opinion will not be printed in the Washington Appellate Reports, but it will be filed for public record pursuant to RCW 2.06.040.



Staab, A.C.J.

WE CONCUR:



Pennell, J.



Cooney, J.

PETITION FOR REVIEW

APPENDIX B

Order Denying Motion to Reconsider page 1

STATE OF WASHINGTON,
Respondent/Plaintiff,

v.

JOHN HENRY SLIGER,
Petitioner/Defendant.

APPEAL FROM
Court of Appeals Division III No. 393151
Re: Ferry County Superior Court No. 20-1-00020-10

FILED
SEPTEMBER 19, 2024
In the Office of the Clerk of Court
WA State Court of Appeals, Division III

COURT OF APPEALS, DIVISION III, STATE OF WASHINGTON


STATE OF WASHINGTON,)	No. 39315-1-III
)	
Respondent,)	
)	
v.)	ORDER DENYING MOTION
)	FOR RECONSIDERATION
JOHN HENRY SLIGER,)	
)	
Petitioner.)	

THE COURT has considered petitioner’s motion for reconsideration and is of the opinion the motion should be denied. Therefore,

IT IS ORDERED, the motion for reconsideration of this court’s decision of August 1, 2024 is hereby denied.

PANEL: Staab, Pennell, Cooney

FOR THE COURT:



Robert Lawrence-Berrey
Chief Judge

MAXEY LAW OFFICE, PLLC

October 21, 2024 - 1:14 PM

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