

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

**STACEY MCMAHON**  
Claimant

**APPEAL NO: 07A-UI-07981-BT**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**JELD-WEN INC**  
Employer

**OC: 07/15/07 R: 03**  
**Claimant: Respondent (1)**

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct  
871 IAC 24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Jeld-Wen, Inc. (employer) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated August 10, 2007, reference 01, which held that Stacey McMahon (claimant) was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on September 4, 2007. The claimant participated in the hearing. The employer participated through Eric Pederson, Production Manager; Scott Logan, Group Manager of Human Resources; and employer representative Rob Sturm. Employer's Exhibit One was admitted into evidence. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

**ISSUE:**

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct.

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was employed as a full-time package line operator from July 31, 2006 through July 18, 2007 when she was discharged for excessive unexcused absenteeism. She received warnings for attendance on October 4, 2006; December 8, 2006; March 26, 2007; and a final written warning on June 20, 2007. Some of those warnings were rescinded because the absences were due to the claimant's work-related injury and were therefore excused. The last two absences were on July 17 and 18, 2007. The claimant called in to report her absences which were due to illness. The employer did not excuse these absences because the claimant's workers' compensation provider released her to return to work on these dates.

**REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct. A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has

discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a.

Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

2. Discharge for misconduct. If the department finds that the individual has been discharged for misconduct in connection with the individual's employment:

a. The individual shall be disqualified for benefits until the individual has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the individual's weekly benefit amount, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

871 IAC 24.32(1)a provides:

Discharge for misconduct.

(1) Definition.

a. "Misconduct" is defined as a deliberate act or omission by a worker which constitutes a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of such worker's contract of employment. Misconduct as the term is used in the disqualification provision as being limited to conduct evincing such willful or wanton disregard of an employer's interest as is found in deliberate violation or disregard of standards of behavior which the employer has the right to expect of employees, or in carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design, or to show an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests or of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. On the other hand mere inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, failure in good performance as the result of inability or incapacity, inadvertencies or ordinary negligence in isolated instances, or good faith errors in judgment or discretion are not to be deemed misconduct within the meaning of the statute.

The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). The claimant was discharged on July 18, 2007 for excessive unexcused absenteeism.

871 IAC 24.32(7) provides:

(7) Excessive unexcused absenteeism. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is an intentional disregard of the duty owed by the claimant to the employer and shall be considered misconduct except for illness or other reasonable grounds for which the employee was absent and that were properly reported to the employer.

Excessive unexcused absenteeism, a concept which includes tardiness, is misconduct. Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. Id. Excessive absences are not misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due to properly reported illness can never constitute job misconduct since they are not volitional. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The final absences were due to illness and were properly reported, and therefore, not considered misconduct. It is conceivable that the claimant was ill even after being medically released to return to work. Inasmuch as the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct, benefits are allowed.

**DECISION:**

The unemployment insurance decision dated August 10, 2007, reference 01, is affirmed. The claimant was discharged. Misconduct has not been established. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

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Susan D. Ackerman  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

sda/pjs