

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

SAMUEL HUFFMAN
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 14A-UI-03520-ET

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

MENARD INC
Employer

OC: 03/02/14
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge/Misconduct
871 IAC 24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism
Section 96.3-7 – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the March 26, 2014, reference 02, decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call before Administrative Law Judge Julie Elder on April 23, 2014. The claimant did not respond to the hearing notice by providing a phone number where he could be reached at the date and time of the hearing as evidenced by the absence of his name and phone number on the Clear2There screen showing whether the parties have called in for the hearing as instructed by the hearing notice. The claimant did not participate in the hearing or request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice. Noah Mayer, Department Manager of Non-Conveyables and Tracey Nelson, Human Resources Coordinator, participated in the hearing on behalf of the employer. Employer's Exhibit One was admitted into evidence.

ISSUE:

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

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed as a full-time general warehouse laborer for Menard from January 15, 2013 to January 21, 2014. He was discharged from employment due to a final incident of absenteeism that occurred on January 18, 2014.

The employer uses a rolling 90-day attendance policy. Employees are assigned one point for an incident of tardiness or leaving early; three points for an unexcused absence; and five points for a no-call no-show absence. Points drop off after 90 days. Employees receive a written warning for points one through eight; receive a three-day suspension for the ninth points; and are discharged when they reach 10 points. Any absences that can be verified as out of the employees' control is excused. Those include, but are not limited to, absences covered by a doctor's note, a receipt for a new tire after calling in with a flat tire, a program from a funeral service, and absences of that nature.

The claimant had an unexcused absence December 12, 2013, and received three points which placed him at nine points at that time and consequently he was suspended for three days. Points dropped off before his next one point attendance occurrence issued January 2, 2014, when he failed to return from lunch on time and was 17 minutes late. On January 9, 2014, someone else called in for the claimant at 3:00 p.m. and said he had to attend a funeral but he did not provide a program from the service or anything to prove he was at a funeral and received three points. The employer told the claimant it was not acceptable to have someone else call in for him and fail to call for his 5:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. shift until 3:00 p.m. On January 18, 2014, the claimant's girlfriend called the employer and reported the claimant was arrested the previous night and was in jail so would not be at work that day. That claimant received three points for that absence for a total of 10 points and his employment was terminated January 21, 2014. There is no evidence that these absences were related to illness.

The claimant has claimed and received unemployment insurance benefits since his separation from this employer.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for disqualifying job misconduct.

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(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.

The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. The term "absenteeism" also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as "tardiness." An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, jail, and oversleeping are not considered excused. Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984).

The employer has established that the claimant was warned that further unexcused absences could result in termination of employment and the final absence was not excused. The final absence, in combination with the claimant's history of absenteeism, is considered excessive. Therefore, benefits are denied.

871 IAC 24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)“b” as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

The unemployment insurance law requires benefits be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later denied benefits even if the claimant acted in good faith and was not at fault. However, a claimant will not have to repay an overpayment when an initial decision to award benefits on an employment separation issue is reversed on appeal if two conditions are met: (1) the claimant did not receive the benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation, and (2) the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding that awarded benefits. In addition, if a claimant is not required to repay an overpayment because the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding, the employer's account will be charged for the overpaid benefits. Iowa Code § 96.3-7-a, -b.

The claimant received benefits but has been denied benefits as a result of this decision. The claimant, therefore, was overpaid benefits.

Because the employer participated in the fact-finding interview, the claimant is required to repay the overpayment and the employer will not be charged for benefits paid.

A designated witness for the employer was personally involved in the fact-finding interview in addition to providing copies of the employer's attendance policy and the claimant's warnings and termination paperwork. The employer participated in the fact-finding interview as that term is defined by Iowa rule. Therefore, the claimant's overpayment cannot be waived. The claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$2,035.00.

DECISION:

The March 26, 2014, reference 02, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment due to excessive, unexcused absenteeism. Benefits are withheld until such time as he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he is otherwise eligible. The claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$2,035.00.

Julie Elder
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

je/pjs