

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

JOSEPH M HORSTMAN
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 13A-UI-06409-LT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

EXIDE TECHNOLOGIES
Employer

OC: 04/07/13
Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The claimant filed an appeal from the May 22, 2013, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on July 11, 2013. Claimant participated. Employer participated through human resources manager, Tim Guyer. Employer's Exhibit 1 was received. Claimant's Exhibits A and B were received.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job related misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was rehired full time as a material handler on September 21, 2012, and was separated from employment on March 7, 2013. The final absence was for the third shift of March 6-7 when he called in because of back pain after shoveling snow. (Claimant's Exhibit A) The employer had not previously warned claimant his job was in jeopardy for any similar reasons but had been terminated in 2009 for attendance issues. He was either tardy or forgot to punch in on October 24, and December 28, 2012, February 6, 15, and 19, 2013. He reported absences on November 14, 2012, December 10, 27, February 4, 20, 21 through 28, and March 1, 4, 5, and 6, 2013. He was medically excused from work from February 19 through March 5, 2013 due to thoracic-lumbar strain. (Claimant's Exhibit B) The employer has a no-fault attendance policy that treats all absences the same, regardless of reason. (Employer's Exhibit 1)

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

Iowa Code § 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 employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due to properly reported illness or injury cannot constitute job misconduct since they are not volitional. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). A determination as to whether an absence is excused or unexcused does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer's attendance policy. Absences due to properly reported illness cannot constitute work-connected misconduct since they are not volitional, even if the employer was fully within its rights to assess points or impose discipline up to or including discharge for the absence under its attendance policy. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7); *Cosper*, supra; *Gaborit v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 734 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). Medical documentation is not essential to a determination that an absence due to illness should be treated as excused. *Gaborit*, supra.

The employer has not established that claimant had excessive absences which would be considered unexcused for purposes of unemployment insurance eligibility. Because his last absence was related to properly reported injury or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct. Since the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct, and, without such, the history of other incidents need not be examined. Accordingly, benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The May 22, 2013 (reference 01) decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided he is otherwise eligible.

Dévon M. Lewis
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/css