

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

TRACY BLUE
Claimant

AGRI STAR MEAT & POULTRY LLC
Employer

APPEAL NO. 14A-UI-08666-GT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 07/20/14
Claimant: Appellant (2)

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated August 11, 2014, reference 01, which held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a hearing was scheduled for and held on September 9, 2014. Claimant participated personally. Employer failed to respond to the hearing notice and did not participate.

ISSUE:

The issue in this matter is whether claimant was discharged for misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant last worked for employer on July 21, 2014.

Employer discharged claimant on July 23, 2014 because claimant had missed work on July 22, 2014. Claimant had an injury that was exacerbated by his work duties. Claimant went to the doctor and had not had a chance to provide proof of his excused absence to the employer on that date. When he arrived at work on July 23, 2014 he was told that his employment was terminated and he was escorted out of the plant. Claimant had missed work on prior occasions, but each of those absences was excused by a doctor's note. Claimant had been warned that he was in violation of the employer's attendance point system approximately a month earlier. Claimant did not think he was in jeopardy of being terminated because he was receiving treatment for a work-related injury.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Huntoon v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(4) provides:

(4) Report required. The claimant's statement and the employer's statement must give detailed facts as to the specific reason for the claimant's discharge. Allegations of misconduct or dishonesty without additional evidence shall not be sufficient to result in disqualification. If the employer is unwilling to furnish available evidence to corroborate the allegation, misconduct cannot be established. In cases where a suspension or disciplinary layoff exists, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct shall be resolved.

The gravity of the incident, number of policy violations and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation. The Iowa Supreme Court has opined that one unexcused absence is not misconduct even when it followed nine other excused absences and was in violation of a direct order. *Sallis v. EAB*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). 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 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.

In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct when claimant violated employer's policy concerning attendance.

The last incident, which brought about the discharge, fails to constitute misconduct because claimant's absence was excused by a physician. The administrative law judge holds that claimant was not discharged for an act of misconduct and, as such, is qualified for the receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated August 11, 2014, reference 01, is reversed. Claimant is eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, provided claimant meets all other eligibility requirements.

Duane L. Golden
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dlg/css