

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

JEREMIAH MATHIS JR
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-08886-JTT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

VAN DIEST SUPPLY CO
Employer

OC: 05/03/09
Claimant: Respondent (1)

Iowa Code Section 96.5(2)(a) – Discharge for Misconduct
871 IAC 24.32(8) – Current Act Requirement

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the June 12, 2009, reference 01, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held on July 7, 2009. Claimant Jeremiah Mathis participated. Kevin Spencer, Director of Plant Operations, represented the employer. Exhibits One through Nine were received into evidence.

ISSUES:

Whether the claimant was discharged for misconduct in connection with the employment that disqualifies the claimant for unemployment insurance benefits.

Whether the discharge was based on a current act of misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Jeremiah Mathis was employed by Van Diest Supply Company as a full-time production team leader from February 2008 until May 4, 2009, when Kevin Spencer, Director of Plant Operations discharged him from the employment. Jason Raymond, Production Shift Leader, was Mr. Mathis' immediate supervisor.

The final incident that triggered the discharge occurred during the April 16-17 overnight shift and came to the employer's attention on April 17, 2009. Mr. Mathis had directed one employee to assist another. The employee initially refused and directed a derogatory remark to Mr. Mathis. Mr. Mathis responded in kind. Mr. Raymond spoke to Mr. Mathis on April 17 about this incident, decided it had been blown out of proportion, but issued a written reprimand warning that further similar conduct could result in disciplinary action up to termination of the employment.

At the beginning of May, Kevin Spencer, Director of Plant Operations, reviewed Mr. Mathis' personnel file and decided to discharge Mr. Spencer for the April 17 incident and other prior concerns. On May 4, Mr. Spencer notified Mr. Mathis of the discharge.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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 of proof in this matter. See Iowa Code section 96.6(2). Misconduct must be substantial in order to justify a denial of unemployment benefits. Misconduct serious enough to warrant the discharge of an employee is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits. See Lee v. Employment Appeal Board, 616 N.W.2d 661 (Iowa 2000). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. See Gimbel v. Employment Appeal Board, 489 N.W.2d 36, 39 (Iowa Ct. App. 1992).

While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of the current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act(s). The termination of employment must be based on a current act. See 871 IAC 24.32(8). In determining whether the conduct that prompted the discharge constituted a "current act," the administrative law judge considers the date on which the conduct came to the attention of the employer and the date on which the employer notified the claimant that the conduct subjected the claimant to possible discharge. See also Greene v. EAB, 426 N.W.2d 659, 662 (Iowa App. 1988).

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. See 871 IAC 24.32(4). When it is in a party's power to produce more direct and satisfactory evidence than is actually produced, it may fairly

be inferred that the more direct evidence will expose deficiencies in that party's case. See Crosser v. Iowa Dept. of Public Safety, 240 N.W.2d 682 (Iowa 1976).

The evidence in the record fails to establish a current act of misconduct. The evidence indicates that the incident that triggered the discharge occurred on April 16-17 and came to the employer's attention on April 17. The employer spoke with Mr. Mathis on April 17 and decided that a written reprimand was appropriate. The employer waited until May 4 to notify Mr. Mathis that the incident placed his employment jeopardy. At that point, the April 16-17 incident no longer constituted a current act of misconduct. Because the discharge was not based on a current act of misconduct, the discharge would not disqualify Mr. Mathis for unemployment insurance benefits. Accordingly, Mr. Mathis is eligible for benefits, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged for benefits paid to Mr. Mathis.

DECISION:

The Agency representative's June 12, 2009, reference 01, decision is affirmed. The claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. The claimant is eligible for benefits, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account may be charged.

James E. Timberland
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jet/css