

IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Section  
1000 East Grand—Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
DECISION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
68-0157 (7-97) – 3091078 - EI

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WAL-MART STORES INC  
c/o TALX EMPLOYER SERVICES  
PO BOX 283  
ST LOUIS MO 63166-0283

Appeal Number: 06A-UI-05401-DT  
OC: 04/23/06 R: 03  
Claimant: Respondent (1)

**This Decision Shall Become Final**, unless within fifteen (15) days from the date below, you or any interested party appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by submitting either a signed letter or a signed written Notice of Appeal, directly to the **Employment Appeal Board, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor—Lucas Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319**.

The appeal period will be extended to the next business day if the last day to appeal falls on a weekend or a legal holiday.

STATE CLEARLY

1. The name, address and social security number of the claimant.
2. A reference to the decision from which the appeal is taken.
3. That an appeal from such decision is being made and such appeal is signed.
4. The grounds upon which such appeal is based.

YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in this appeal or you may obtain a lawyer or other interested party to do so provided there is no expense to Workforce Development. If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, you may obtain the services of either a private attorney or one whose services are paid for with public funds. It is important that you file your claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

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(Administrative Law Judge)

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(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. (employer) appealed a representative's May 11, 2006 decision (reference 01) that concluded Gregory L. Hayes (claimant) was qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on June 9, 2006. The claimant participated in the hearing. Dan McKinney appeared on the employer's behalf. 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:

Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant started working for the employer on August 24, 2005. He worked full time as a dry grocery sales associate in the employer's Oskaloosa, Iowa, store. His last day of work was March 22, 2006. The employer discharged him on April 18, 2006. The reason asserted for the discharge was excessive absenteeism.

Prior to March 22, 2006, the claimant had missed other days of work due to illness; he had been advised that his job was in jeopardy due to his attendance. The claimant is subject to migraine headaches, and in March 2006 was suffering them nearly daily. On March 24, 2006 he submitted a request for a leave of absence due to his headaches. His doctor provided a statement to the employer on or by April 3, 2006 that specified that the claimant was to be off work with no anticipated return to work date.

The claimant believed everything was in order to cover his absence while he was receiving treatment for the migraines. However, Mr. McKinney, the store manager, was not satisfied because the claimant had not signed the leave of absence papers himself and he was not convinced of the claimant's medical condition because a customer had reported to him that he had seen the claimant outside standing around a vehicle being worked on at a neighbor's home. Mr. McKinney left a couple messages instructing the claimant to come into the store and speak to him directly; the claimant did come in on one of those days and Mr. McKinney was unable to visit with the claimant. The claimant visited with an assistant manager and left with the understanding that the assistant manager was satisfied with the explanation and would pass on the information to Mr. McKinney. However, Mr. McKinney still wanted to visit directly with the claimant, but the claimant was unable to return to the store before April 18. At that time, Mr. McKinney determined that the claimant had been absent for more than 15 days without a satisfactory explanation, and discharged the claimant.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue in this case is whether the employer discharged the claimant for reasons establishing work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. The issue is not whether the employer was right to terminate the claimant's employment, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. Infante v. IDJS, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what is misconduct that warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. Pierce v. IDJS, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988).

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. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. Cosper v. IDJS, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

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.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

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.

Absenteeism can constitute misconduct, however, to be misconduct, absences must be both excessive and unexcused. 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 for the absence under its attendance policy. Cosper, supra. Here, the employer knew or should have known by virtue of the doctor's statement which the employer did not question, that the claimant would be absent for an extended period of time. Floyd v. Iowa Dept. of Job Service, 338 N.W.2d 536 (Iowa App. 1986). Because the final absence was related to a properly reported illness or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of unexcused

absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct and no disqualification is imposed. The employer has failed to meet its burden to establish misconduct. Cosper, supra. The claimant's actions were not misconduct within the meaning of the statute, and the claimant is not disqualified from benefits.

DECISION:

The representative's May 11, 2006 decision (reference 01) is affirmed. The employer did discharge the claimant but not for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits, if he is otherwise eligible.

ld/cs