

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

DAMARCO D REED

Claimant

APPEAL NO: 14A-UI-00913-DT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

BRIDGESTONE AMERICAS TIRE

Employer

OC: 06/30/13

Claimant: Appellant (1)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge
Section 96.6-2 - Timeliness of Appeal

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Damarco D. Reed (claimant) appealed a representative's December 23, 2013 decision (reference 05) that concluded he was not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment from Bridgestone America's Tire (employer). After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on February 17, 2014. The claimant participated in the hearing. Jim Funcheon appeared on the employer's behalf and presented testimony from two other witnesses, Adam Sevangle and Jeff Higgins. During the hearing, Exhibit A-1 and Employer's Exhibits One through Four were entered into evidence. 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.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant's appeal timely or are there legal grounds under which it should be treated as timely? Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

OUTCOME:

Affirmed. Benefits denied.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The representative's decision was mailed to the claimant's last-known address of record on December 23, 2013. The claimant did not receive the decision until about January 24, 2014. The decision contained a warning that an appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeals Section by January 2, 2014. The appeal was not filed until it was hand-delivered to a local Agency office on January 24, 2014, which is after the date noticed on the disqualification decision.

The claimant started working for the employer on June 6, 2011. He worked full time as production worker on the second shift at the employer's Des Moines, Iowa facility. His last day of work was November 27, 2013. The employer discharged him on that date. The stated reason for the discharge was a second violation of the employer's mutual respect policies.

The employer had placed the claimant on a one-year probationary agreement on February 28, 2013 after a verbal altercation with another employee. On November 20 the claimant had a disagreement with another employee and the production supervisor, Sevangle, became involved. The claimant commented directly to Sevangle that "you can't argue with a f - - - ing woman," and Sevangle heard the claimant tell the other employee "you better watch yourself." The employer found this conduct in violation of the mutual respect policy and of the probationary agreement, and discharged the claimant.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The preliminary issue in this case is whether the claimant timely appealed the representative's decision. Iowa Code § 96.6-2 provides that unless the affected party (here, the claimant) files an appeal from the decision within ten calendar days, the decision is final and benefits shall be paid or denied as set out by the decision.

The ten calendar days for appeal begins running on the mailing date. The "decision date" found in the upper right-hand portion of the representative's decision, unless otherwise corrected immediately below that entry, is presumptive evidence of the date of mailing. *Gaskins v. Unempl. Comp. Bd. of Rev.*, 429 A.2d 138 (Pa. Comm. 1981); *Johnson v. Board of Adjustment*, 239 N.W.2d 873, 92 A.L.R.3d 304 (Iowa 1976).

Pursuant to rules 871 IAC 26.2(96)(1) and 871 IAC 24.35(96)(1), appeals are considered filed when postmarked, if mailed. *Messina v. IDJS*, 341 N.W.2d 52 (Iowa 1983).

The record in this case shows that more than ten calendar days elapsed between the mailing date and the date this appeal was filed. The Iowa court has declared that there is a mandatory duty to file appeals from representatives' decisions within the time allotted by statute, and that the administrative law judge has no authority to change the decision of a representative if a timely appeal is not filed. *Franklin v. IDJS*, 277 N.W.2d 877, 881 (Iowa 1979). Compliance with appeal notice provisions is jurisdictional unless the facts of a case show that the notice was invalid. *Beardslee v. IDJS*, 276 N.W.2d 373, 377 (Iowa 1979); see also *In re Appeal of Elliott*, 319 N.W.2d 244, 247 (Iowa 1982). The question in this case thus becomes whether the appellant was deprived of a reasonable opportunity to assert an appeal in a timely fashion. *Hendren v. IESC*, 217 N.W.2d 255 (Iowa 1974); *Smith v. IESC*, 212 N.W.2d 471, 472 (Iowa 1973). The record shows that the appellant did not have a reasonable opportunity to file a timely appeal.

The administrative law judge concludes that failure to file a timely appeal within the time prescribed by the Iowa Employment Security Law was due to Agency error or misinformation or delay or other action of the United States Postal Service pursuant to 871 IAC 24.35(2), or other factor outside of the claimant's control. The administrative law judge further concludes that the appeal should be treated as timely filed pursuant to Iowa Code § 96.6-2. Therefore, the administrative law judge has jurisdiction to make a determination with respect to the nature of the appeal. See, *Beardslee*, supra; *Franklin*, supra; and *Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company v. Employment Appeal Board*, 465 N.W.2d 674 (Iowa App. 1990).

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 § 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 § 96.5-2-a.

In order to establish misconduct such as to disqualify a former employee from benefits an employer must establish the employee was responsible for a deliberate act or omission which was a material breach of the duties and obligations owed by the employee to the employer. 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 275 N.W.2d 445 (Iowa 1979); *Henry v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa App. 1986). The conduct must show a 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. 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon*, supra; *Henry*, supra. In contrast, 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. 871 IAC 24.32(1)a; *Huntoon*, supra; *Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984).

The claimant's verbal comments to and regarding his coworker after the prior probation for violation of the mutual respect policy shows a willful or wanton disregard of the standard of behavior the employer has the right to expect from an employee, as well as an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. The employer discharged the claimant for reasons amounting to work-connected misconduct.

DECISION:

The appeal in this case is treated as timely. The representative's December 23, 2013 decision (reference 05) is affirmed. The employer discharged the claimant for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance benefits as of November 27, 2013. This disqualification continues until the claimant has been paid ten times his weekly benefit amount for insured work, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account will not be charged.

Lynette A. F. Donner
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

ld/pjs