

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

COBY EUANS
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 15R-UI-04858-JE-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

AGRI STAR MEAT & POULTRY LLC
Employer

OC: 01/11/15
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge/Misconduct
871 IAC 24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism
Section 96.3-7 – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the January 26, 2015, reference 01, decision that allowed benefits to the claimant. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call before Administrative Law Judge Julie Elder on June 1, 2015. The claimant did not respond to the hearing notice and did not participate in the hearing or request a postponement of the hearing as required by the hearing notice. Laura Rooney, Payroll/Human Resources Assistant, participated in the hearing on behalf of the employer.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed as a full-time sanitation laborer for Agri Star Meat & Poultry from August 22, 2013 to December 8, 2014. He was discharged from employment due to a final incident of absenteeism that occurred on December 4, 2014.

The employer's attendance policy allows three excused absences during a rolling 90-day period. If an employee accumulates a fourth absence during that time he receives a written warning; if he accumulates a fifth absence during that time he receives a three-day suspension; and if he accumulates a sixth absence during that time his employment is terminated.

The claimant called in and stated he had a flat tire June 3, 2014, for his first absence. He called in and reported he had migraines June 25 and July 29, 2014, did not provide a doctor's note for either day, and was assessed his second and third absences. On September 2, 2014, the claimant stated he had a doctor appointment but did not provide a doctor's note. That absence resulted in a written warning issued to the claimant September 9, 2014.

The claimant was a no-call/no-show October 7 and 8 and November 19, 20, and 23, 2014. He was suspended November 24, 2014, and told to return December 1, 2014. The suspension document clearly stated that if the claimant had another absence without a doctor's note his employment would be terminated.

On December 4, 2014, the claimant called and indicated he was having transportation problems and would not be at work. He was then a no-call/no-show December 5 and 7, 2014, his next two scheduled workdays. The employer terminated his employment December 8, 2015, for excessive unexcused absenteeism.

The claimant has claimed and received unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$3,838.00 for the 18 weeks ending May 16, 2015

The employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview held at 1:15 p.m. January 23, 2015.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for disqualifying job misconduct.

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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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 determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. The term "absenteeism" also encompasses conduct that is more accurately referred to as "tardiness." An absence is an extended tardiness, and an incident of tardiness is a limited absence. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984).

The claimant had 12 absences, including seven no-call/no-show absences, between June 3 and December 7, 2014. Of those 12 absences, two were due to illness, and the remaining ten were unexcused. The employer has established that the claimant was warned that further unexcused absences could result in termination of employment and the final absence was not excused. The final absence, in combination with the claimant's history of absenteeism, is considered excessive. Therefore, benefits are denied.

871 IAC 24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

(2) "A continuous pattern of nonparticipation in the initial determination to award benefits," pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, as the term is used for an entity representing employers, means on 25 or more occasions in a calendar quarter beginning with the first calendar quarter of 2009, the entity files appeals after failing to participate. Appeals filed but withdrawn before the day of the contested case hearing will not be considered in determining if a continuous pattern of nonparticipation exists. The division administrator shall notify the employer's representative in writing after each such appeal.

(3) If the division administrator finds that an entity representing employers as defined in Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, has engaged in a continuous pattern of nonparticipation, the division administrator shall suspend said representative for a period of up to six months on the first occasion, up to one year on the second occasion and up to ten years on the third or subsequent occasion. Suspension by the division administrator constitutes final agency action and may be appealed pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.19.

(4) "Fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual," as the term is used for claimants in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means providing knowingly false statements or knowingly false denials of material facts for the purpose of obtaining unemployment insurance benefits. Statements or denials may be either oral or written by the claimant. Inadvertent misstatements or mistakes made in good faith are not considered fraud or willful misrepresentation.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.3(7)“b” as amended by 2008 Iowa Acts, Senate File 2160.

The unemployment insurance law requires benefits be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later denied benefits even if the claimant acted in good faith and was not at fault. However, a claimant will not have to repay an overpayment when an initial decision to award benefits on an employment separation issue is reversed on appeal if two conditions are met: (1) the claimant did not receive the benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation, and (2) the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding that awarded benefits. In addition, if a claimant is not required to repay an overpayment because the employer failed to participate in the initial proceeding, the employer’s account will be charged for the overpaid benefits. Iowa Code section 96.3(7)a, b.

The claimant received benefits but has been denied benefits as a result of this decision. The claimant, therefore, was overpaid benefits.

Because the claimant did not receive benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation and employer failed to participate in the finding interview, the claimant is not required to repay the overpayment and the employer remains subject to charge for the overpaid benefits.

The unemployment insurance law provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. However, the overpayment will not be recovered when it is based on a reversal on appeal of an initial determination to award benefits on an issue regarding the claimant’s employment separation if: (1) the benefits were not received due to any fraud or willful misrepresentation by the claimant and (2) the employer did not participate in the initial proceeding to award benefits. In this case, the claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. There is no evidence the claimant received benefits due to fraud or willful misrepresentation. However, the employer did not participate in the fact-finding interview personally or through written statements. Consequently, the claimant’s overpayment of benefits is waived and his overpayment, in the amount of \$3,838.00 to date, shall be charged to the employer’s account.

DECISION:

The January 26, 2015, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment due to excessive, unexcused absenteeism. Benefits are withheld until such time as he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he is otherwise eligible. The claimant’s overpayment of \$3,838.00 to date shall be charged to the employer’s account.

Julie Elder
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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