

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

DAVID A WALKER
Claimant

HARVEST MANAGEMENT SUB TRS CORP
Employer

APPEAL 16A-UI-09491-NM-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 07/03/16
Claimant: Respondent (1)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(1)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed an appeal from the August 23, 2016, (reference 04) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on September 16, 2016. The claimant David Walker participated and testified. The employer Harvest Management Sub TRS Corp. participated through General Manager Cathy Scott.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?
Has the claimant been overpaid any unemployment insurance benefits, and if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the agency be waived?
Can any charges to the employer's account be waived?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed full time as a maintenance technician from May 31, 2016, until this employment ended on July 5, 2016, when he was discharged.

On July 1, 2016, a work order was submitted to have a resident's emergency call system installed. The task was identified in the employer's system as "critical," meaning it should be completed within 24 hours. However, this task was not submitted until after claimant had left for the day. Claimant is not required to return to work to complete tasks that are submitted after he is off work, even if the task is identified as critical. Management received notice that the task was not completed on July 3, 2016, and the decision was made to terminate claimant. Scott was going to notify claimant of this decision on July 4, 2016, but claimant did not come into work that day because he mistakenly assumed he had it off as a paid holiday. Claimant was discharged by Scott the next day, July 5. While claimant had been trained and coached on ticket timelines during his trainings, he had no prior warnings or discipline.

The claimant filed a new claim for unemployment insurance benefits with an effective date of July 3, 2016. The claimant filed for and received a total of \$2,303.00 in unemployment insurance benefits for the weeks between July 3 and August 20, 2016. The employer did not participate in the fact finding interview regarding the separation on August 22, 2016. The fact finder determined claimant qualified for benefits.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

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).

The employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa

Ct. App. 1984). Misconduct must be “substantial” to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. *Newman v. Iowa Dep’t of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984).

In an at-will employment environment an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job related misconduct as the reason for the separation, it incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. A determination as to whether an employee’s act is misconduct does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer’s policy or rule. A violation is not necessarily disqualifying misconduct even if the employer was fully within its rights to impose discipline up to or including discharge for the incident under its policy.

The conduct for which claimant was discharged was at best an isolated incident, but likely was not misconduct at all. Claimant testified, and the employer did not dispute, that the work order was not submitted until after he had gone for the day. Both parties agreed that claimant was not expected to return to work to complete an order submitted after his work day was over. Even if claimant had received the work order prior to leaving for the day, he had no prior warnings or disciplinary action. An employee is entitled to fair warning that the employer will no longer tolerate certain performance and conduct. Without fair warning, an employee has no reasonable way of knowing that there are changes that need be made in order to preserve the employment. If an employer expects an employee to conform to certain expectations or face discharge, appropriate (preferably written), detailed, and reasonable notice should be given. Training or general notice to staff about a policy is not considered a disciplinary warning. Inasmuch as employer had not previously warned claimant about the issue leading to the separation, it has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted deliberately or with recurrent negligence in violation of company policy, procedure, or prior warning. Accordingly, benefits are allowed. As benefits are allowed, the issues of overpayment and participation are moot.

DECISION:

The August 23, 2016, (reference 04) unemployment insurance decision is affirmed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided he is otherwise eligible. Any benefits claimed and withheld on this basis shall be paid. The issues of overpayment and participation are moot.

Nicole Merrill
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

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