

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

ERIC J ROSE
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-02905-LT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

KERRY INC
Employer

OC: 01/18/08
Claimant: Respondent (1)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the February 13, 2009, reference 01, decision that allowed benefits. After due notice was issued, a telephone conference hearing was held on March 19, 2009. Claimant participated. Employer participated through Heather Damro and Alex Crozier.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether claimant was discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having heard the testimony and having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant most recently worked full-time as a warehouse worker and was employed from October 8, 2007 until January 22, 2009 when he was discharged. On January 21 he was operating a forklift and while moving two pallets to another machine and back to the storage spot another worker placed a hand pallet jack in a small space where claimant intended to return the pallet. Because of the confined space, other activity and his attention was directed at his tasks with the pallets at the tipper machine, he did not see the other employee place the hand pallet jack in that spot. He turned 80 degrees, moved forward with a pallet on the forklift, and when he went to return the pallet to its place he unknowingly hit the pallet jack with the pallet he was replacing. The pallet jack was damaged.

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 § 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.

871 IAC 24.32(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

The employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 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. IDJS*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. IDJS*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988). Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be "substantial." When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). Poor work performance is not misconduct in the absence of evidence of intent. *Miller v. Employment Appeal Board*, 423 N.W.2d 211 (Iowa App. 1988).

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, employer incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. Employer has not met the burden of proof to establish that claimant acted with knowledge of the hand pallet jack placement. Given the circumstances, claimant would not have reasonably known that someone had placed the hand pallet jack where it did not belong in the short time his back was turned working with the pallet that was being returned to that spot. No misconduct or negligence on claimant's part has been established, thus the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct and benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The February 13, 2009, reference 01, decision is affirmed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

Dévon M. Lewis
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/pjs