

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

JOSHUA A SMOUSE

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-04017-E2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

PELLA CORPORATION

Employer

OC: 02/08/09

Claimant: Appellant (2)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from a decision of a representative dated March 5, 2009, reference 01, which held claimant ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After due notice, a telephone conference hearing was scheduled for and held on April 8, 2009. Claimant participated personally. Employer participated by Nick Schultz and Jeff Heuton. Exhibit One, pages 1-7, was admitted into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issue in this matter is whether claimant was discharged for misconduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds: Claimant was discharged on January 7, 2009 by employer because he failed to lock-out/tag-out a machine he was working on. The claimant was copying the procedure he saw the machine engineer, Andy Rowling, use to fix the machine. The claimant was aware of the employer's policy for safety and the requirement to lock-out/tag-out machines when working on them. The claimant admitted he was not following proper procedure when his employer confronted him about not following the lock-out/tag-out rule.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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.

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 gravity of the incident, number of policy violations and prior warnings are factors considered when analyzing misconduct. The lack of a current warning may detract from a finding of an intentional policy violation. The claimant received a "class two" warning on November 26, 2008 for a quality problem with his production. He had not received any warnings concerning safety and the tag-out/lock-out policy.

A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer discharges him for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a. The employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. Lee v. Employment Appeal Board, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000).

For unemployment insurance purposes, misconduct amounts to a deliberate act and a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of a worker's contract of employment. Misconduct is a deliberate violation or disregard of the standard of behavior the employer has a right to expect from employees or is an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests or of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. Inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, unsatisfactory performance due to inability or incapacity, inadvertence

or ordinary negligence in isolated incidents, or good-faith errors in judgment or discretion are not deemed to constitute work-connected misconduct. 871 IAC 24.32(1)(a).

The claimant was discharged for violation of a company rule. He was attempting to keep production going. He made an error in judgment. Not every error in judgment is misconduct. The claimant had not been warned of a similar violation. The claimant's action amounts to ordinary negligence in an isolated incident, or good-faith error in judgment and as such is not misconduct.

In this matter, the evidence fails to establish that claimant was discharged for an act of misconduct.

DECISION:

The decision of the representative dated March 5, 2009, reference 01, is reversed. Claimant is eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, provided claimant meets all other eligibility requirements.

James Elliott
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

jfe/css