

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

RONNIE A SCHENKEL
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 14A-UI-02473-S2T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

ROCK-TENN CONVERTING COMPANY
Employer

OC: 02/02/14
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct
Section 96.3-7 – Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Rock-Tenn Converting Company (employer) appealed a representative's February 25, 2014, decision (reference 01) that concluded Ronnie Schenkel (claimant) was discharged and there was no evidence of willful or deliberate misconduct. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was scheduled for March 27, 2014. The claimant participated personally. The employer participated by Kelly Shader, Administrative Assistant/Human Resources Assistant. The employer offered and Exhibit One was received into evidence.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the claimant was separated from employment for any disqualifying reason.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was hired on December 5, 2012, as a full-time assembly material handler. The claimant signed for receipt of the employer's handbook on December 5, 2012. On November 1, 2013, the employer issued the claimant a written warning for attendance issues. All the claimant's absences were for medical issues and properly reported. The employer notified the claimant that further infractions could result in termination from employment. On November 11, 2013, the employer issued the claimant a final written warning for absenteeism. The claimant was absent once for medical issues and four times for non-medical issues. The employer notified the claimant that further infractions could result in termination from employment. On December 4, 2013, the employer placed the claimant on a thirty-day performance improvement plan for his absences. The claimant's goal was to have no more than three excused absences/medical absences during the 30-day period. The claimant met the goal. In January 2014, the claimant was absent once when his son was ill and once for weather issues. On February 3, 2014, the claimant was in Chicago, Illinois, and did not make it back to work. The claimant was absent on February 5, 2014, due to car problems. The employer terminated the claimant on February 6, 2014, for excessive unexcused absenteeism.

The claimant filed for unemployment insurance benefits with an effective date of February 2, 2014. He received \$2,447.00 in benefits after the separation from employment. The employer participated personally at the fact-finding interview on February 24, 2014, by Kelly Shader.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged for 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.

871 IAC 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).

An employer is entitled to expect its employees to report to work as scheduled or to be notified when and why the employee is unable to report to work. 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 unexcused absenteeism, is considered excessive. Benefits are withheld.

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 § 96.3-7-a, -b.

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 claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits that he was not entitled to receive. The employer participated personally in the fact-finding interview and is not chargeable. The claimant is overpaid 2,447.00 in unemployment insurance benefits.

The claimant’s and the employer’s testimony is not the same. The administrative law judge finds the employer’s testimony to be more credible because it was more consistent.

DECISION:

The representative’s February 25, 2014, decision (reference 01) is reversed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because the claimant was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until the claimant has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times the claimant’s weekly benefit amount, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible. The claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits that he was not entitled to receive. The employer participated personally in the fact finding interview and is not chargeable. The claimant is overpaid 2,447.00 in unemployment insurance benefits.

Beth A. Scheetz
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

bas/pjs