

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

SETH J BAKER
Claimant

APPEAL NO. 13A-UI-04177-HT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

IPSCO TUBULARS INC
Employer

OC: 03/03/13
Claimant: Respondent (2-R)

Section 96.5(2)a - Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer, Ipsco Tubulars, Inc. (Ipsco), filed an appeal from a decision dated March 26, 2013, reference 01. The decision allowed benefits to the claimant, Seth Baker. After due notice was issued a hearing was held by telephone conference call on May 15, 2013. The claimant participated on his own behalf. The employer participated by Human Resources Specialist and Area Supervisor Steve Lawrence.

ISSUE:

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

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Seth Baker was employed by Ipsco from March 2, 2010 until March 8, 2013 as a full-time machine operator. He was placed on a "last chance agreement" January 31, 2013, for excessive absenteeism. The agreement stated he must get "prior approval" for any absences or tardies in the future by contacting his area supervisor, the plant manager or the director of human resources.

Normally an employee reports an absence to the guard shack at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the shift. But this extra provision to contact a member of management was instituted for the claimant because of his absenteeism.

On March 4, 2013, the claimant called the guard shack to report he would be absent but did not get the required approval from the area manager, the plant manager or the director of human resources. On March 8, 2013, he was discharged for failing to properly report his final absence.

Seth Baker has received unemployment benefits since filing a claim with an effective date of March 3, 2013.

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(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 claimant had been advised his job was in jeopardy as a result of his absenteeism. Rather than discharging him the employer allowed a last chance agreement. Mr. Baker mistakenly believed this prior approval was required only for absences planned in advance, but the area supervisor who gave him the warning was specific that it applied to tardiness as well as absences. The claimant should therefore have known the prior approval applied to more than simply absences planned in advance.

Mr. Baker also maintained he did not know who he was to call but the people to be notified were written in bold type on the warning itself. His assertion he did not know the phone number is also not credible as they were posted in the work place or he could have asked for them from the guard or from his supervisor at any time in order to be prepared.

The claimant was discharged for a final occurrence of unexcused absenteeism. A properly reported illness cannot be considered misconduct as it is not volitional. *Cosper v. IDJS*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982), but he did not properly report it. Under the provisions of the above Administrative Code section, this is misconduct and the claimant is disqualified.

Iowa Code section 96.3-7, as amended in 2008, provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

a. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

b. (1) If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5. However, provided the benefits were not received as the result of fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual, benefits shall not be recovered from an individual if the employer did not participate in the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to section 96.6, subsection 2, and an overpayment occurred because of a subsequent reversal on appeal regarding the issue of the individual's separation from employment. The employer shall not be charged with the benefits.

(2) An accounting firm, agent, unemployment insurance accounting firm, or other entity that represents an employer in unemployment claim matters and demonstrates a continuous pattern of failing to participate in the initial determinations to award benefits, as determined and defined by rule by the department, shall be denied permission by the department to represent any employers in unemployment insurance matters. This subparagraph does not apply to attorneys or counselors admitted to practice in the courts of this state pursuant to section 602.10101.

The claimant has received unemployment benefits to which he is not entitled. The question of whether the claimant must repay these benefits is remanded to the UIS division.

DECISION:

The representative's decision of March 26, 2013, reference 01, is reversed. Seth Baker is disqualified and benefits are withheld until he has earned ten times his weekly benefit amount in insured work, provided he is otherwise eligible. The issue of whether the claimant must repay the unemployment benefits is remanded to UIS division for determination.

Bonny G. Hendricksmeier
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

bgh/pjs