

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

DARRELL HIATT

Claimant

APPEAL NO. 07A-UI-10098-BT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

CARGILL MEAT SOLUTIONS CORP

Employer

**OC: 06/17/07 R: 03
Claimant: Respondent (1)**

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct
871 IAC 24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Cargill Meat Solutions Corporation (employer) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated October 22, 2007, reference 02, which held that Darrell Hiatt (claimant) was eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on November 19, 2007. The claimant participated in the hearing with union representative, Bryan Ulin. The employer participated through Katie Holcomb, Human Resources Manager. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct.

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 employed as a full-time production employee from October 20, 1987 through August 13, 2007 when he was discharged for violation of the employer's attendance policy. His last absence was August 1, 2007 when he missed work due to illness. He properly reported his absence but claimed it under the Family Medical Leave Act. The delay in discharge resulted from the employer's investigation as to whether the absence could be claimed under FMLA and the conclusion was that it could not. The claimant received a written warning on July 16, 2007 and on August 31, 2007.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct. A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged the claimant for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a.

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.

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. Newman v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa App. 1984). The claimant was discharged on August 13, 2007 for excessive unexcused absenteeism.

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.

Excessive unexcused absenteeism, a concept which includes tardiness, is misconduct. Higgins v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 350 N.W.2d 187 (Iowa 1984). The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. Id. Excessive absences are not misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due

to properly reported illness can never constitute job misconduct since they are not volitional. Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The final absence was due to illness and was properly reported and, therefore, not considered misconduct. Inasmuch as the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct, benefits are allowed.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated October 22, 2007, reference 02, is affirmed. The claimant was discharged. Misconduct has not been established. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

Susan D. Ackerman
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

sda/css