

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

MICHAEL STOGDILL
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 11A-UI-08774-BT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

WAL-MART STORES INC
Employer

OC: 06/05/11
Claimant: Appellant (1)

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a - Discharge for Misconduct
871 IAC 24.32(7) - Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Michael Stogdill (claimant) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated June 28, 2011, reference 01, which held that he was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits because he was discharged from Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. (employer) for work-related misconduct. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on July 27, 2011. The claimant participated in the hearing. The employer participated through Diane Barton, 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 claimant was discharged for misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits.

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 full-time as a non-conveyable order filler from October 28, 1996 through June 3, 2011. He was discharged from employment due to excessive absenteeism with a final incident on June 2, 2011. The claimant's last actual day of work was December 12, 2010 and he was on leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) so that he could take care of his mother. However, he eventually had to go on a personal leave of absence since he no longer qualified for FMLA because he had not worked 1,250 hours in the last 12-month timeframe.

The employer's disciplinary policy provides three steps before termination occurs. Step one is a verbal warning, step two is a written warning and step three is a decision-making day. The employer's attendance policy provides that employees will be terminated if they have five occurrences or 100 hours. The claimant received a step one verbal warning on May 19, 2011 when he had three occurrences and 60 hours. A step two written warning was issued on May 26, 2011 when he had four occurrences and 80 hours. The claimant had previously

received a decision-making day on an unrelated matter so the next step was termination instead of a third step decision-making day. The human resources manager spoke with the claimant on the phone repeatedly about his continued absences and their effect on his employment. The claimant did not return to work and was discharged after his final absence on June 2, 2011, which included a full week of absences after his final warning.

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 June 2, 2011 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.

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).

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 absenteeism, is considered excessive. Benefits are denied.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated June 28, 2011, reference 01, is affirmed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because he was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he is otherwise eligible.

Susan D. Ackerman
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

sda/css