

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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

FORREST K PARKER
Claimant

APPEAL NO: 19A-UI-07005-JE-T

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

VAN DIEST SUPPLY COMPANY
Employer

OC: 08/04/19
Claimant: Respondent (2)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge/Misconduct
Section 96.3-7 – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

The employer filed a timely appeal from the August 23, 2019, reference 01, decision that allowed benefits to the claimant. After due notice was issued, a hearing was held by telephone conference call before Administrative Law Judge Julie Elder on September 26, 2019. The claimant did not respond to the hearing notice and did not participate in the hearing. Carolyn Cross, Human Resources Manager; Kevin Spencer, Director of Plant Operations – Dry Manufacturing; Nancy Bell, Night Shift Manager; and Lee Trask, Vice-President of Manufacturing; participated in the hearing on behalf of the employer and were represented by Attorney Espnola Cartmill. Employer's Exhibits One through Five were admitted into evidence.

ISSUE:

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

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: The claimant was employed as a full-time production operator for Van Diest Supply Company from April 22, 2019 to August 7, 2019. He was discharged for violating the employer's cell phone policy.

The claimant worked from 11:00 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. On August 6, 2019, Night Shift Manager Nancy Bell entered the claimant's work area and came around a corner to discover the claimant leaning over a drum holding his cell phone. The employer has a strict policy regarding cell phones which are not allowed in the building because a spark from an electronic device could cause a fire or explosion due to the nature of the materials the employer uses. The cell phone policy (Employer's Exhibit One) is contained in the handbook which the claimant signed for on April 22, 2019 (Employer's Exhibit Two). The cell phone policy is also discussed in orientation and a separate policy regarding the prohibition of the use of cell phones is presented to team members (Employer's Exhibit Three). Ms. Bell asked the claimant if he knew the policy and the claimant said yes but he forgot his cell phone in his pocket until it vibrated when he received an email and he took his phone out and checked his email. Employees change into uniforms in the

locker room and if the claimant discovered he had his cell phone in the pocket of his street clothes the proper procedure involved asking his manager if he could return his cell phone to his vehicle but the claimant did not do so. Ms. Bell told the claimant he was in violation of the policy and would have to leave and come back in the morning to meet with Director of Plant Operations – Dry Manufacturing Kevin Spencer. The claimant left and returned the following morning to meet with Mr. Spencer and Director of Quality Grant Sletten. He repeated to them what he told Ms. Bell about forgetting his cell phone in his pocket and getting an email and checking his phone at that time. He stated he was aware of the employer's cell phone policy. Mr. Spencer and Mr. Sletten contacted Vice-President of Manufacturing Lee Trask and explained the situation and Mr. Trask directed them to terminate the claimant's employment for violation of a known work rule.

The claimant has claimed and received unemployment insurance benefits in the amount of \$1,110.00 for the three weeks ending August 24, 2019.

The employer personally participated in the fact-finding interview through the statements of Human Resources Manager Carolyn Cross and Director of Quality Grant Sletten.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for disqualifying job misconduct.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits:

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 disqualification shall continue 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Huntoon v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

The employer has the burden of proving disqualifying misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). A claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if an employer has discharged him for reasons constituting work-connected misconduct. Iowa Code section 96.5-2-a. Misconduct that disqualifies an individual from receiving unemployment insurance benefits occurs when there are deliberate acts or omissions that constitute a material breach of the worker's duties and obligations to the employer. See 871 IAC 24.32(1).

The claimant was aware of the employer's cell phone rule and chose to violate that policy. The rule is a safety measure designed to prevent fires and explosions. The claimant did not simply forget to remove his cell phone from the pocket of his street clothes; he transferred it to his uniform, rather than ask his manager if he could return it to his vehicle where it is required to be stored during work hours, and also removed it from his pocket and checked his email on the floor. The claimant knew or should have known his actions would result in his termination but despite that knowledge he chose to violate the rule resulting in his separation from this employer.

Under these circumstances, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant's conduct demonstrated a willful disregard of the standards of behavior the employer has the right to expect of employees and shows an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. The employer has met its burden of proving disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. IDJS*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). Therefore, benefits are denied.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 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 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 section 96.3(7)a, b.

The claimant received benefits but has been denied benefits as a result of this decision. The claimant, therefore, was overpaid benefits.

Because the employer participated in the fact-finding interview, the claimant is required to repay the overpayment and the employer's account will not be charged for benefits paid.

The employer participated in the fact-finding interview personally through the statements of Human Resources Manager Carolyn Cross and Director of Quality Grant Sletten. Consequently, the claimant's overpayment of benefits cannot be waived and he is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$1,110.00 for the three weeks ending August 24, 2019.

DECISION:

The August 23, 2019, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment due to job-related misconduct. Benefits are withheld until such time as he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he is otherwise eligible. The claimant has received benefits but was not eligible for those benefits. The employer personally participated in the fact-finding interview within the meaning of the law. Therefore, the claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$1,110.00 for the three weeks ending August 24, 2019.

Julie Elder
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

je/scn