

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

**ROGER W WHITEBEAR**  
Claimant

**APPEAL NO. 11A-UI-06154-LT**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**WINNEBAGO TRIBE OF NEBRASKA  
WINNAVEGAS**  
Employer

**OC: 02/27/11  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the March 28, 2011 (reference 01) decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a telephone conference hearing was held on April 28, 2011. Claimant participated. Employer responded to the hearing notice instructions but was not available when the hearing was called, did not respond to the voice mail message, and did not participate.

**ISSUE:**

The issue is whether claimant was discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of benefits.

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having heard the testimony and having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant most recently worked full-time as a cage cashier and was separated from employment on March 1, 2011. He was absent due to a chronic medical condition covered by medical excuses, which employer declined but said he had not provided. After cage manager Juanita Whitebeaver heard false rumors that he had talked about her she sent him home, counted that absence against him, which resulted in his discharge.

**REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

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(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 employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due to properly reported illness or injury cannot constitute job misconduct since they are not volitional. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating claimant, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. *Infante v. IDJS*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what misconduct warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. *Pierce v. IDJS*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988).

An employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job related misconduct as the reason for the separation, employer incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. A reported absence related to illness or injury is excused for the purpose of the Iowa Employment Security Act. An employer's point system or no-fault absenteeism policy is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for benefits. Because the final absence for which he was discharged was related to either properly reported illness or the supervisor sending him home early, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism has been established and no disqualification is imposed.

**DECISION:**

The March 28, 2011 (reference 01) decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

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Dévon M. Lewis  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/pjs