

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

BRET A BUCKLIN
Claimant

TPI IOWA LLC
Employer

**APPEAL 20A-UI-14715-AW-T
ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

**OC: 04/12/20
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2) – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) – DM – Excessive unexcused absenteeism

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Claimant filed an appeal from the November 3, 2020 (reference 04) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on January 27, 2021 at 4:10 p.m. Claimant participated. Employer did not participate. Claimant's Exhibits A – C were admitted. Official notice was taken of the administrative record.

ISSUES:

Whether claimant is able to and available for work.
Whether claimant is on an approved leave of absence.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed as a full-time Laborer with TPI Iowa from August 11, 2008 until his employment ended on August 10, 2020. Claimant worked from 11:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. Sunday evening through Friday morning. From July 20, 2020 until August 11, 2020, claimant was absent from work due to illness. Claimant notified employer that he would be absent prior to the beginning of each shift that he missed. On August 11, 2020, claimant received a letter from employer that stated his employment was terminated for excessive absenteeism effective August 10, 2020. Claimant had no prior warnings regarding his attendance.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

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 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:

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 of misconduct has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. *Reigelsberger v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 500 N.W.2d 64, 66 (Iowa 1993); *accord Lee v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000). Further, the employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(8) provides:

(8) *Past acts of misconduct.* While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

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. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. 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. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. The requirements for a finding of misconduct based on absences are therefore twofold. First, the absences must be excessive. *Sallis v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 192 (Iowa 1984). Second, the absences must be unexcused. *Cosper*, 321 N.W.2d at 10. The requirement of "unexcused" can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for

“reasonable grounds,” *Higgins*, 350 N.W.2d at 191, or because it was not “properly reported,” holding excused absences are those “with appropriate notice.” *Cosper*, 321 N.W.2d at 10.

Absences due to properly reported illness cannot constitute work-connected misconduct since they are not volitional, even if the employer was fully within its rights to assess points or impose discipline up to or including discharge for the absence under its attendance policy. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7); *Cosper*, 321 N.W.2d at 9; *Gaborit v. Emp’t Appeal Bd.*, 734 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). Medical documentation is not essential to a determination that an absence due to illness should be treated as excused. See *Gaborit*, 734 N.W.2d at 555-558. An employer’s no-fault absenteeism policy or point system is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for unemployment insurance benefits.

Claimant’s absences from July 20, 2020 through August 11, 2020 were for reasonable grounds and were properly reported. Therefore, the absences were excused and do not constitute misconduct. Without a current or final act of misconduct, the history of other absences need not be examined. Furthermore, claimant had no prior warnings regarding his attendance. Claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed provided claimant is otherwise eligible.

DECISION:

The November 3, 2020 (reference 04) unemployment insurance decision is reversed. Claimant was discharged for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed provided claimant is otherwise eligible.



Adrienne C. Williamson
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February 16, 2021
Decision Dated and Mailed

acw/ol