

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

LILLIANA QUINONES

Claimant

APPEAL NO: 12A-UI-07569-BT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

SWIFT PORK COMPANY

Employer

OC: 05/13/12

Claimant: Respondent (2/R)

Iowa Code § 96.5-2-a - Discharge for Misconduct
871 IAC 24.32(7) - Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism
Iowa Code § 96.3-7 - Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Swift Pork Company (employer) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated June 14, 2012, reference 01, which held that Lilliana Quinones (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 August 14, 2012. The claimant participated in the hearing. Ike Rocha interpreted on behalf of the claimant. The employer participated through Aureliano Diaz, first shift human resources manager, and Javier Sanchez, second shift assistant human resources manager. Employer's Exhibit One was admitted into evidence. 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 having considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was employed as a full-time production worker from August 27, 2011 through May 9, 2012. She was discharged from employment due to violation of the attendance policy. The claimant was aware that she had to call in to report her absence when she was not going to be at work. One point is issued for a properly reported absence and two points are issued for a no-call/no-show.

The claimant received a written warning on March 1, 2012 because she had accumulated 5.5 attendance points. She received one point for an absence due to illness on October 1, 2011 and a half point for leaving early on February 9, 2012. The other four points were issued for a no-call/no-show on February 21, 2012 and a second no-call/no-show on February 28, 2012. The warning, which the claimant signed, stated that she would receive a second written warning if she accrued eight attendance points.

Subsequent to the written warning, the claimant received one point each for absences due to illness on April 10 and April 16, 2012. These absences gave her 7.5 attendance points, but she was not discharged until after she accrued two additional points for a third no-call/no-show on May 4, 2012.

The claimant filed a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective May 13, 2012 and has received benefits after the separation from employment.

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 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 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 discharged employee is disqualified for benefits for misconduct. *Sallis v. Employment Appeal Bd.*, 437 N.W.2d 895, 896 (Iowa 1989). The claimant was discharged on May 9, 2012 for 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. See 871 IAC 24.32(7).

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 claimant had three no-call/no-shows within a four-month period and the third one was after her written warning. 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.

Iowa Code § 96.3(7) provides that benefits must be recovered from a claimant who receives benefits and is later determined to be ineligible for benefits, even though the claimant acted in good faith and was not otherwise at fault. The overpayment recovery law was updated in 2008. See Iowa Code § 96.3(7)(b). Under the revised law, a claimant will not be required to repay an overpayment of benefits if all of the following factors are met. First, the prior award of benefits must have been made in connection with a decision regarding the claimant's separation from a particular employment. Second, the claimant must not have engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation to obtain the benefits or in connection with the Agency's initial decision to award benefits. Third, the employer must not have participated at the initial fact-finding proceeding that resulted in the initial decision to award benefits. If Workforce Development determines there has been an overpayment of benefits, the employer will not be charged for the benefits, regardless of whether the claimant is required to repay the benefits.

Because the claimant has been deemed ineligible for benefits, any benefits the claimant has received could constitute an overpayment. Accordingly, the administrative law judge will remand the matter to the Claims Division for determination of whether there has been an overpayment, the amount of the overpayment, and whether the claimant will have to repay the benefits.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated June 14, 2012, reference 01, is reversed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits, because she was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until she has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount, provided she is otherwise eligible. The matter is remanded to the Claims Section for investigation and determination of the overpayment issue.

Susan D. Ackerman
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

sda/kjw