

IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Section  
1000 East Grand—Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
DECISION OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
68-0157 (7-97) – 3091078 - EI

CAREY BUTLER  
2210 LINDEN  
IOWA FALLS IA 50126

BERRY IOWA CORP  
c/o THOMAS AND THORNGREN  
PO BOX 280100  
NASHVILLE IA 37228

**AMENDED**

Appeal Number: 06A-UI-02095-BT  
OC: 07/03/05 R: 02  
Claimant: Respondent (2)

**This Decision Shall Become Final**, unless within fifteen (15) days from the date below, you or any interested party appeal to the Employment Appeal Board by submitting either a signed letter or a signed written Notice of Appeal, directly to the ***Employment Appeal Board, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor—Lucas Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.***

The appeal period will be extended to the next business day if the last day to appeal falls on a weekend or a legal holiday.

STATE CLEARLY

1. The name, address and social security number of the claimant.
2. A reference to the decision from which the appeal is taken.
3. That an appeal from such decision is being made and such appeal is signed.
4. The grounds upon which such appeal is based.

YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in this appeal or you may obtain a lawyer or other interested party to do so provided there is no expense to Workforce Development. If you wish to be represented by a lawyer, you may obtain the services of either a private attorney or one whose services are paid for with public funds. It is important that you file your claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

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(Administrative Law Judge)

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(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct  
871 IAC 24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism  
Section 96.3-7 – Overpayment

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Berry Iowa Corporation (employer) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated February 10, 2006, reference 04, which held that Carey Butler (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 March 10, 2006. The claimant participated in the hearing. The employer participated through Judy Hammarmeister, Human Resources Supervisor.

#### 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 printing operator at a plastic container distribution center from September 18, 2005, through January 25, 2006. She was discharged from employment due to excessive unexcused absenteeism with a final incident on January 25, 2006, when she did not return to work, for personal reasons. The claimant had already received three written warnings for attendance on January 8, 11, and 12, 2006. She was on a 90-day probation and was warned that any further absences could result in her termination from employment. She felt those days should be excused because she reportedly had a doctor's excuse but had not provided that doctor's excuse to the employer prior to her discharge.

The claimant worked nights and left work early on January 22, 2006. She called and directly spoke with the human resources supervisor on January 23, 2006, to ask for a couple days off due to marital problems. The claimant explained the circumstances to the human resources supervisor at that time. The supervisor told her she could have two days but was expected to return to work on January 25, 2006. The claimant called and left a message during the day of January 25, 2006 stating she needed another day. The supervisor called her back in the afternoon and left a message that if she did not return to work, she would be terminated. The claimant did not call back that day and did not return to work that night.

The claimant filed a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective July 3, 2005, and has received benefits after the separation from employment in the amount of \$1,068.00.

#### 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 section 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.

This definition has been accepted by the Iowa Supreme Court as accurately reflecting the intent of the legislature. Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

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 January 25, 2006, 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 claimant told the fact-finder that her final absence was due to illness but admitted she told the employer it was for personal issues. The employer had never heard the allegation of illness prior to the hearing. The claimant's credibility was weakened because of inconsistent statements made throughout the hearing and statements made that are contrary to statements admittedly provided to the fact-finder. The claimant contends she has a medical excuse for her final absences but failed to provide such excuse to either the employer or the Appeals Section. The preponderance of the evidence demonstrates the claimant's final absence was not due to illness but was the result of her marital problems.

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 withheld.

Iowa Code section 96.3-7 provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which the claimant was not entitled. Those benefits must be recovered in accordance with the provisions of Iowa law.

#### DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated February 10, 2006, reference 04, 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 claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$1,068.00.

sdb/kjw/tjc