

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

**ROGER JOHNSON**  
Claimant

**APPEAL NO. 09A-UI-09844-BT**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**HEARTLAND EXPRESS INC OF IOWA**  
Employer

**Original Claim: 05/24/09  
Claimant: Respondent (2/R)**

Iowa Code § 96.5-1-d - Voluntary Leaving/Illness or Injury  
871 IAC 24.25(35) - Separation Due to Illness or Injury  
Iowa Code § 96.3-7 - Overpayment

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

Heartland Express Inc of Iowa (employer) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated July 6, 2009, reference 02, which held that Roger Johnson (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 July 27, 2009. The claimant participated in the hearing. The employer participated through Lea Peters, Human Resources Generalist. 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's voluntary separation from employment qualifies him to receive unemployment insurance 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 over-the-road truck driver from January 19, 2007 through May 8, 2008, when he stopped working due to a non-work-related medical condition. At the time he left, he suspected he suffered a stroke, which was confirmed by his physician. According to the federal Department of Transportation guidelines, an employee cannot drive commercially for at least one year after suffering a stroke. The claimant has not obtained a full medical release to return to work after the one-year time period expired. Continuing work was available, but the claimant had not contacted the recruiting department.

The claimant filed a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective May 24, 2009 and has received benefits after the separation from employment.

## REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue to be determined is whether the reasons for the claimant's separation from employment qualify him to receive unemployment insurance benefits. The claimant is not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits if he voluntarily quit without good cause attributable to the employer. Iowa Code § 96.5-1. The claimant left his employment on May 8, 2009 due to a non-work related medical condition.

Iowa Code § 96.5-1-d provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits:

1. Voluntary quitting. If the individual has left work voluntarily without good cause attributable to the individual's employer, if so found by the department. But the individual shall not be disqualified if the department finds that:

d. The individual left employment because of illness, injury or pregnancy upon the advice of a licensed and practicing physician, and upon knowledge of the necessity for absence immediately notified the employer, or the employer consented to the absence, and after recovering from the illness, injury or pregnancy, when recovery was certified by a licensed and practicing physician, the individual returned to the employer and offered to perform services and the individual's regular work or comparable suitable work was not available, if so found by the department, provided the individual is otherwise eligible.

871 IAC 24.25(35) provides:

Voluntary quit without good cause. In general, a voluntary quit means discontinuing the employment because the employee no longer desires to remain in the relationship of an employee with the employer from whom the employee has separated. The employer has the burden of proving that the claimant is disqualified for benefits pursuant to Iowa Code § 96.5. However, the claimant has the initial burden to produce evidence that the claimant is not disqualified for benefits in cases involving Iowa Code § 96.5, subsection (1), paragraphs "a" through "i," and subsection 10. The following reasons for a voluntary quit shall be presumed to be without good cause attributable to the employer:

(35) The claimant left because of illness or injury which was not caused or aggravated by the employment or pregnancy and failed to:

- (a) Obtain the advice of a licensed and practicing physician;
- (b) Obtain certification of release for work from a licensed and practicing physician;
- (c) Return to the employer and offer services upon recovery and certification for work by a licensed and practicing physician; or
- (d) Fully recover so that the claimant could perform all of the duties of the job.

The claimant went on a medical leave of absence due to a non-work-related illness. He was unable to carry out the essential functions of his position due to his medical condition and while the claimant may be available to do other types of work, the employer has no duty to accommodate when an employee is restricted due to non-work-related medical restrictions.

Consequently, the claimant was not laid off for lack of work but voluntarily separated for personal reasons. A voluntary quit is not attributable to the employer if caused by illness not connected to the employment. Wolf's v. IESCI, 244 Iowa 999, 59 N.W.2d 216 (1953).

The claimant would only be eligible for benefits if his position were not available to him after his recovery. A "recovery" under Iowa Code § 96.5-1-d means a complete recovery without restriction. White v. Employment Appeal Board, 487 N.W.2d 342, 345 (Iowa 1992) (citing Hedges v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 368 N.W.2d 862, 867 (Iowa App. 1985)). The claimant has not been released to return to full work duties. Accordingly, the separation is without good cause attributable to the employer and benefits must be 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 July 6, 2009, reference 02, is reversed. The claimant voluntarily left work without good cause attributable to the employer. Benefits are withheld until he has worked in and has been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount, provided he 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