

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

**MINDY L GRIFFITHS**  
Claimant

**SEABOARD FOODS OF IOWA LLC**  
Employer

**APPEAL 22A-UI-05648-AD-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 11/07/21  
Claimant: Respondent (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct  
Iowa Code § 96.5(1) – Voluntary Quitting  
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer/Representative Participation Fact-finding Interview

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

On February 28, 2022, Seaboard Foods of Iowa LLC (employer/appellant) filed an appeal from the Iowa Workforce Development (“IWD”) decision dated February 16, 2022 (reference 04) that allowed unemployment insurance benefits based on a finding that claimant was dismissed from work on November 3, 2021 for unsatisfactory work.

A telephone hearing was held on April 13, 2022. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. Employer participated by HR Manager Erin Hyde. Multi-site Supervisor Brock Puffett participated as a witness for employer. Mindy Griffiths (claimant/respondent) participated personally.

No exhibits were admitted for the reasons stated on the record. Official notice was taken of the administrative record.

**ISSUE(S):**

- I. Was the separation from employment disqualifying?
- II. Was the claimant overpaid benefits? Should claimant repay benefits or should employer be charged due to employer participation in fact finding?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds:

Claimant’s first day of employment was December 13, 2019. Claimant was initially employed full-time as an Animal Caretaker 2. She was promoted to a full-time Animal Caretaker Utility position in July 2020. Claimant’s supervisor in this position most recently was Mr. Puffett. He became her supervisor on May 21, 2021. She remained in that position until she was discharged by Mr. Puffett, Ms. Hyde, and Production Manager Adam Ruth on November 3, 2021.

Claimant was discharged due to failing to properly care for animals for which she was responsible. When Mr. Puffett became claimant's supervisor there was a renewed focus on animal care. There were numerous conversations about this issue in July 2021 and a training in September 2021. One of claimant's responsibilities was to check each animal in her care each day to make sure they did not need medical care or to be euthanized.

Claimant received a final written warning on October 13, 2021 for failing to properly care for animals. Mr. Puffett was in her work area and noted some animals that were injured and needed to be immediately euthanized. The injuries were readily apparent even from the central walkway of the building. Mr. Puffett determined those animals should have received medical care and/or been euthanized sooner but claimant failed to do so. Claimant was the only person working at this site over the prior couple weeks.

The final incident was on November 3, 2021. Mr. Puffett was again in claimant's work area on that day and again observed several animals that were injured and needed to be immediately euthanized. The injuries were readily apparent even from the central walkway of the building. Mr. Puffett determined based on his observations of the injuries that those animals had likely been injured for several days and should have received medical care and/or been euthanized sooner. Claimant was the only person working at this site over the prior week.

Claimant did not intentionally fail to provide necessary care for the animals she was responsible for but did fail to properly check them each day to determine whether or not they needed care or to be euthanized.

The unemployment insurance system shows claimant has received weekly benefits in the amount of \$531.00 for a total of nine weeks, from the benefit week ending November 13, 2021 and continuing through the benefit week ending January 8, 2022. The total amount of benefits paid to date is \$4,779.00.

Ms. Hyde participated in the February 15, 2020 fact-finding interview that was held prior to the decision allowing benefits being issued. She provided at that time substantially the same information as is set forth above.

## **REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:**

For the reasons set forth below, the decision dated February 16, 2022 (reference 04) that allowed unemployment insurance benefits based on a finding that claimant was dismissed from work on November 3, 2021 for unsatisfactory work is REVERSED.

### **I. Was the separation from employment disqualifying?**

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)a provides:

An individual shall be disqualified for benefits, regardless of the source of the individual's wage credits:

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 provides in relevant part:

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 Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

The employer bears the burden of proving that a claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). *Myers v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 462 N.W.2d 734, 737 (Iowa Ct. App. 1990). 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).

Misconduct serious enough to warrant discharge is not necessarily serious enough to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits. Such misconduct must be "substantial." *Newman v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984). The focus is on deliberate, intentional, or culpable acts by the employee. When based on carelessness, the carelessness must actually indicate a "wrongful intent" to be disqualifying in nature. *Newman, Id.* In contrast, 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. *Newman, Id.*

When reviewing an alleged act of misconduct, the finder of fact may consider past acts of misconduct to determine the magnitude of the current act. *Kelly v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 386 N.W.2d 552, 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 1986). However, conduct asserted to be disqualifying misconduct must be both specific and current. *West v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 489 N.W.2d 731 (Iowa 1992); *Greene v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 426 N.W.2d 659 (Iowa Ct. App. 1988).

Because our unemployment compensation law is designed to protect workers from financial hardships when they become unemployed through no fault of their own, we construe the provisions "liberally to carry out its humane and beneficial purpose." *Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc. v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 570 N.W.2d 85, 96 (Iowa 1997). "[C]ode provisions which operate to work a

forfeiture of benefits are strongly construed in favor of the claimant." *Diggs v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 478 N.W.2d 432, 434 (Iowa Ct. App. 1991).

Employer has carried its burden of proving claimant is disqualified from receiving benefits because of a current act of substantial misconduct within the meaning of Iowa Code section 96.5(2). Claimant did not intentionally fail to provide necessary care for the animals she was responsible for. However, she did fail to properly check them each day to determine whether or not they needed care or to be euthanized. This occurred for several animals on multiple occasions despite claimant being counseled, trained, and warned about it. This constitutes carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to show an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and as such the separation from employment was disqualifying.

- II. Was the claimant overpaid benefits? Should claimant repay benefits and/or charge employer due to employer participation in fact finding?

Iowa Code section 96.3(7) provides, in pertinent part:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits.

a. 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.

b. (1) (a) 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.

(b) However, provided the benefits were not received as the result of fraud or willful misrepresentation by the individual, benefits shall not be recovered from an individual if the employer did not participate in the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to section 96.6, subsection 2, and an overpayment occurred because of a subsequent reversal on appeal regarding the issue of the individual's separation from employment.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 provides:

Employer and employer representative participation in fact-finding interviews.

(1) "Participate," as the term is used for employers in the context of the initial determination to award benefits pursuant to Iowa Code section 96.6, subsection 2, means submitting detailed factual information of the quantity and quality that if unrebutted would be sufficient to result in a decision favorable to the employer. The most effective means to participate is to provide live testimony at the interview from a witness with firsthand knowledge of the events leading to the separation. If no live testimony is provided, the employer must provide the name and telephone number of an employee with firsthand information who may be contacted, if necessary, for rebuttal. A party may also participate by providing detailed written statements or documents that provide detailed factual information of the events leading to separation. At a minimum, the information provided by the employer or

the employer's representative must identify the dates and particular circumstances of the incident or incidents, including, in the case of discharge, the act or omissions of the claimant or, in the event of a voluntary separation, the stated reason for the quit. The specific rule or policy must be submitted if the claimant was discharged for violating such rule or policy. In the case of discharge for attendance violations, the information must include the circumstances of all incidents the employer or the employer's representative contends meet the definition of unexcused absences as set forth in 871—subrule 24.32(7). On the other hand, written or oral statements or general conclusions without supporting detailed factual information and information submitted after the fact-finding decision has been issued are not considered participation within the meaning of the statute.

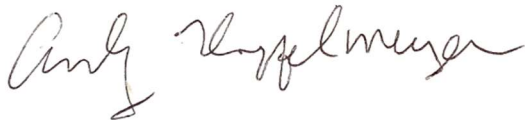
The unemployment insurance system shows claimant has received weekly benefits in the amount of \$531.00 for a total of nine weeks, from the benefit week ending November 13, 2021 and continuing through the benefit week ending January 8, 2022. The total amount of benefits paid to date is \$4,779.00. Because the administrative law judge now finds claimant's November 3, 2021 separation from employment was disqualifying she has been overpaid benefits in that amount.

Because employer did participate in the fact-finding interview within the meaning of Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 and the overpayment occurred because of a subsequent reversal on appeal regarding the issue of the individual's separation from employment, benefits shall be recovered from claimant. 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.

**DECISION:**

The decision dated February 16, 2022 (reference 04) that allowed unemployment insurance benefits based on a finding that claimant was dismissed from work on November 3, 2021 for unsatisfactory work is REVERSED. The separation from employment was disqualifying. The disqualification will continue until claimant earns wages for insured work equal to ten times her weekly benefit amount.

Claimant has been overpaid benefits in the amount of \$4,779.00. Benefits shall be recovered from claimant. 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.



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Andrew B. Duffelmeyer  
Administrative Law Judge

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April 18, 2022  
Decision Dated and Mailed

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