

**IOWA DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTIONS AND APPEALS  
ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS DIVISION, UI APPEALS BUREAU**

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**ROXANNE S BALVANZ**  
Claimant

**JOHN DEERE COMPANY**  
Employer

**APPEAL 22A-UI-19512-DZ-T**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**OC: 11/06/22**  
**Claimant: Respondent (1)**

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Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct  
Iowa Code § 96.3(7) – Recovery of Benefit Overpayment  
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.10 – Employer Participation in Fact-Finding Interview

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

John Deere Company, the employer/appellant, filed an appeal from the Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) December 2, 2022 (reference 01) unemployment insurance (UI) decision. The decision allowed REGULAR (state) UI benefits because IWD concluded that the employer had dismissed Ms. Balvanz from work on November 3, 2022 for a non-disqualifying reason. The Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals UI Appeals Bureau mailed notices of hearing to the employer and Ms. Balvanz. A telephone hearing was held on January 4, 2023. The employer participated through Theresa Stalnaker, labor relations manager. Ms. Balvanz participated personally. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative record.

**ISSUE:**

Did the employer discharge Ms. Balvanz from employment for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

Was Ms. Balvanz overpaid benefits?

If so, should she repay the benefits?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Ms. Balvanz began working for the employer on October 20, 2008. She works as a full-time assembler.

The employer's policy provides that employees are subject to discipline as follows: written warning after a 5th absence, 3-day in-plant suspension after a 6th absence, 10-day in-plant suspension after a 7th absence, and 30-day suspension unpaid suspension after an 8th absence. The policy further provides that if an employee will be absent, the employee must call the employer's attendance line and/or communicate with their supervisor. The employer gave Ms. Balvanz a copy of the policy.

On Thursday, October 20, 2022, Ms. Balvanz told her supervisor via text message that she would not be able to attend work that day due to illness. The supervisor did not respond. On Friday, October 21, Ms. Balvanz sent her supervisor another text message stating that she was again not able to attend work due to illness. The supervisor did not respond. Ms. Balvanz took short-term disability leave from Monday, October 24 through Wednesday, November 2. Sometime during that week, Ms. Balvanz's supervisor told Ms. Balvanz by text that she did not have sick leave available to use for October 20 and 21. On Thursday, November 3, the employer suspended Ms. Balvanz for 30 days unpaid because her October 21 absence was her 8th absence.

Ms. Balvanz was scheduled to return to work on Monday, December 5. That day, Ms. Balvanz applied for, and the employer approved her for medical leave. As of the hearing date, Ms. Balvanz was still on medical leave and her doctor had not yet released her to return to work. The employer began paying Ms. Balvanz about 60 percent of her usual hourly rate as of December 5.

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

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the employer suspended Ms. Balvanz from November 3, 2022 through December 2, 2022 for no disqualifying reason.

Iowa Code section 96.5(2)(a) and (d) provide:

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.

d. For the purposes of this subsection, "misconduct" means a deliberate act or omission by an employee that constitutes a material breach of the duties and obligations arising out of such the employee's contract of employment. Misconduct is 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(1)(a), (7), (8) and (9) provide:

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.

(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.

(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.

(9) Suspension or disciplinary layoff. Whenever a claim is filed and the reason for the claimant's unemployment is the result of a disciplinary layoff or suspension imposed by the employer, the claimant is considered as discharged, and the issue of misconduct must be resolved. Alleged misconduct or dishonesty without corroboration is not sufficient to result in disqualification.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code section 96.5 and Supreme Court of Iowa decision, Sheryl A. Cosper vs. Iowa Department of Job Service and Blue Cross of Iowa.

The Iowa Supreme Court has held that the definition of misconduct in the administrative rule above accurately reflects the intent of the legislature.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of subrule eight above is to assure that an employer does not save up acts of misconduct and spring them on an employee when an independent desire to terminate arises.

Excessive absenteeism is not considered misconduct unless unexcused. 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. The requirements for a finding of misconduct based on absences are twofold. First, the absences must be excessive.<sup>2</sup> The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings.<sup>3</sup> Second, the absences must be unexcused.<sup>4</sup> The requirement of "unexcused" can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for "reasonable grounds," or because it was not "properly reported," holding excused absences are those "with appropriate notice."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Huntoon v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Sallis v. Emp't Appeal Bd., 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv., 350 N.W.2d 187, 192 (Iowa 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv., 321 N.W.2d 6, 10 (Iowa 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Higgins, 350 N.W.2d at 191; Cosper, 321 N.W.2d at 10.

Absences due to properly reported illness cannot constitute work-connected misconduct since they are not voluntary, 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.<sup>6</sup> Medical documentation is not essential to a determination that an absence due to illness should be treated as excused.<sup>7</sup> An employer's no-fault absenteeism policy or point system is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for unemployment insurance benefits. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused.<sup>8</sup> When claimant does not provide an excuse for an absence the absences is deemed unexcused.<sup>9</sup>

The employer has the burden of proof in establishing disqualifying job misconduct.<sup>10</sup> The issue is not whether the employer made a correct decision in separating the claimant from employment, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits.<sup>11</sup> Misconduct must be "substantial" to warrant a denial of job insurance benefits.<sup>12</sup>

In an at-will employment environment an employer may discharge an employee for any number of reasons or no reason at all if it is not contrary to public policy, but if it fails to meet its burden of proof to establish job related misconduct as the reason for the separation, it incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. A determination as to whether an employee's act is misconduct does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer's policy or rule. A violation employer's policy or rule is not necessarily disqualifying misconduct even if the employer was fully within its rights to impose discipline up to or including discharge for the incident under its policy.

The most recent incident leading to Ms. Balvanz's discharge must be a current act of misconduct to disqualify her from receiving UI benefits. The most recent act for which the employer terminated Ms. Balvanz's employment was for her October 21 absence. Ms. Balvanz's absence that day was for a reasonable ground – illness – and she properly reported the absence to the employer. This absence is excused and is not misconduct. The employer has failed to establish a current act of misconduct.

Since Ms. Balvanz is eligible for UI benefits the issues of overpayment and repayment are moot. Ms. Balvanz is not required to repay the UI benefits she has already received.

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<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> See *Gaborit*, 734 N.W.2d at 555-558.

<sup>8</sup> *Higgins*, 350 N.W.2d at 191.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*; see also *Spragg v. Becker-Underwood, Inc.*, 672 N.W.2d 333, 2003 WL 22339237 (Iowa App. 2003).

<sup>10</sup> *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

<sup>11</sup> *Infante v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984).

<sup>12</sup> *Newman v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 351 N.W.2d 806 (Iowa Ct. App. 1984).

**DECISION:**

The December 2, 2022, (reference 01) UI decision is AFFIRMED. The employer suspended Ms. Balvanz from November 3, 2022 through December 2, 2022 for no disqualifying reason. UI benefits are allowed, as long as no other UI decision denies Ms. Balvanz UI benefits. Any benefits claimed and withheld on this basis shall be paid.

Since Ms. Balvanz is eligible for UI benefits the issues of overpayment and repayment are moot. Ms. Balvanz is not required to repay the UI benefits she has already received.



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Daniel Zeno  
Administrative Law Judge

January 10, 2023  
Decision Dated and Mailed

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**APPEAL RIGHTS.** If you disagree with this decision, you or any interested party may:

**1. Appeal to the Employment Appeal Board** within fifteen (15) days of the date under the judge's signature by submitting a written appeal via mail, fax, or online to:

**Employment Appeal Board  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor – Lucas Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
Fax: (515)281-7191  
Online: eab.iowa.gov**

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.

AN APPEAL TO THE BOARD SHALL 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.

An Employment Appeal Board decision is final agency action. If a party disagrees with the Employment Appeal Board decision, they may then file a petition for judicial review in district court.

**2.** If no one files an appeal of the judge's decision with the Employment Appeal Board within fifteen (15) days, the decision becomes final agency action, and you have the option to **file a petition for judicial review in District Court** within thirty (30) days after the decision becomes final. Additional information on how to file a petition can be found at Iowa Code §17A.19, which is online at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf> or by contacting the District Court Clerk of Court <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

**Note to Parties:** YOU MAY REPRESENT yourself in the appeal or 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.

**Note to Claimant:** It is important that you file your weekly claim as directed, while this appeal is pending, to protect your continuing right to benefits.

**SERVICE INFORMATION:**

A true and correct copy of this decision was mailed to each of the parties listed.

**DERECHOS DE APELACIÓN.** Si no está de acuerdo con la decisión, usted o cualquier parte interesada puede:

**1. Apelar a la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo** dentro de los quince (15) días de la fecha bajo la firma del juez presentando una apelación por escrito por correo, fax o en línea a:

**Employment Appeal Board  
4th Floor – Lucas Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
Fax: (515)281-7191  
En línea: eab.iowa.gov**

El período de apelación se extenderá hasta el siguiente día hábil si el último día para apelar cae en fin de semana o día feriado legal.

UNA APELACIÓN A LA JUNTA DEBE ESTABLECER CLARAMENTE:

- 1) El nombre, dirección y número de seguro social del reclamante.
- 2) Una referencia a la decisión de la que se toma la apelación.
- 3) Que se interponga recurso de apelación contra tal decisión y se firme dicho recurso.
- 4) Los fundamentos en que se funda dicho recurso.

Una decisión de la Junta de Apelaciones de Empleo es una acción final de la agencia. Si una de las partes no está de acuerdo con la decisión de la Junta de Apelación de Empleo, puede presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el tribunal de distrito.

**2.** Si nadie presenta una apelación de la decisión del juez ante la Junta de Apelaciones Laborales dentro de los quince (15) días, la decisión se convierte en acción final de la agencia y usted tiene la opción de **presentar una petición de revisión judicial en el Tribunal de Distrito** dentro de los treinta (30) días después de que la decisión adquiriera firmeza. Puede encontrar información adicional sobre cómo presentar una petición en el Código de Iowa §17A.19, que se encuentra en línea en <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/code/17A.19.pdf> o comunicándose con el Tribunal de Distrito Secretario del tribunal <https://www.iowacourts.gov/iowa-courts/court-directory/>.

**Nota para las partes:** USTED PUEDE REPRESENTARSE en la apelación u obtener un abogado u otra parte interesada para que lo haga, siempre que no haya gastos para Workforce Development. Si desea ser representado por un abogado, puede obtener los servicios de un abogado privado o uno cuyos servicios se paguen con fondos públicos.

**Nota para el reclamante:** es importante que presente su reclamo semanal según las instrucciones, mientras esta apelación está pendiente, para proteger su derecho continuo a los beneficios.

**SERVICIO DE INFORMACIÓN:**

Se envió por correo una copia fiel y correcta de esta decisión a cada una de las partes enumeradas.