

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

MARCO M JANG
BLDG 435 APT 5
926 OAKRIDGE DR
DES MOINES IA 50314-2100

TYSON FRESH MEATS INC
c/o TALX UCM SERVICES
PO BOX 283
ST LOUIS MO 63166-0283

Appeal Number: 06A-UI-04041-DT
OC: 03/05/06 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, 4th 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.

(Administrative Law Judge)

(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc. (employer) appealed a representative's March 23, 2006 decision (reference 01) that concluded Marco M. Jang (claimant) was qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on May 8, 2006. The claimant participated in the hearing. Tom Barrigan appeared on the employer's behalf and presented testimony from one other witness, Mike Cleaver. Robert Talang served as interpreter. 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:

Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant started working for the employer on April 2, 2001. He worked full time as a production worker on the second shift at the employer's Perry, Iowa, meat processing facility. His last day of work was February 24, 2006. The employer suspended him that day and discharged him on February 27, 2006. The stated reason for the discharge was fighting.

Prior to the start of the claimant's shift at 3:45 p.m. on February 24, the claimant and another employee were in the restroom when the other employee told the claimant that he was fat, and that he was going to "f - - - you and f - - - your mother." That employee then left the restroom, and the claimant followed a few minutes later. He approached the other employee who was in the locker room by a locker, and asked the employee why he would have said something like that to him, that they were supposed to respect each other. The other employee acknowledged that he had said what the claimant heard him say.

The claimant then reached for the other employee's shirt collar; the other employee put up his hand as to hit the claimant's hand away, and the claimant hit the other employee's hand, and then pushed him into the lockers, knocking the locker over and resulting in the other employee falling to the ground. The claimant again reached down to grab the other employee's collar, and the other employee hit him in the stomach. The two employees exchanged several more punches until another employee entered the area and told the claimant to stop, that he should not be doing that. The claimant then got ready for work and punched in.

Mr. Cleaver was alerted there had been a fight in the restroom, and both the claimant and the other worker were brought in to provide statements and then sent home. When the claimant spoke to the employer on February 27, he was informed he was discharged for violating the employer's anti-workplace violence policy, of which the claimant was aware.

The claimant established a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective March 5, 2006. The claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits after the separation from employment in the amount of \$1,799.00.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue in this case is whether the employer discharged the claimant for reasons establishing work-connected misconduct. The issue is not whether the employer was right or even had any other choice but to terminate the claimant's employment, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. Infante v. IDJS, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what is misconduct that warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate decisions. Pierce v. IDJS, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988). 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. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. Cosper v. IDJS, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982); 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.

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).

Fighting at work can be misconduct. Savage v. Employment Appeal Board, 529 N.W.2d 640 (Iowa App. 1995). A discharge for fighting is disqualifying misconduct unless the claimant shows 1) failure from fault in bringing on the problem; 2) a necessity to fight back; and 3) he attempted to retreat if reasonably possible. Savage, supra. The claimant did not satisfy this test. The claimant's fighting with the other employee in the employer's locker room shows a willful or wanton disregard of the standard of behavior the employer has the right to expect from an employee, as well as an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. The employer discharged the claimant for reasons amounting to work-connected misconduct.

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 representative's March 23, 2006 decision (reference 01) is reversed. The employer discharged the claimant for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance benefits as of February 27, 2006. This disqualification continues until the claimant has been paid ten times his weekly benefit amount for insured work, provided he is otherwise eligible. The employer's account will not be charged. The claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$1,799.00.

ld/kkf