

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

**CARLOS E VILLALOBOS**  
Claimant

**APPEAL 21A-UI-17769-CS-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**DARLING INTERNATIONAL INC**  
Employer

**OC: 06/06/21  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code §96.5(2)a-Discharge/Misconduct  
Iowa Code §96.5(1)- Voluntary Quit

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

On August 12, 2021, the claimant/appellant filed an appeal from the August 6, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that disallowed benefits based on claimant voluntarily quitting. The parties were properly notified about the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on October 4, 2021. Claimant participated at the hearing. Employer did not register a number to participate in the hearing prior to the hearing and therefore did not participate in the hearing.

**ISSUE:**

Was the separation a layoff, discharge for misconduct, or voluntary quit without good cause?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant began working for employer in September 2020. Claimant last worked as a full-time Cooker Operator. Claimant was separated from employment on April 23, 2021, when he was discharged.

Prior to his shift claimant called into work sick April 26, 2021, and April 27, 2021. Claimant thought he had COVID because he was displaying symptoms. On April 28, 2021, claimant went to the doctor and got tested. Claimant did not call into work before his shift. Later that day claimant called his employer and informed them that he was sick and had taken a COVID test. The employer agreed that claimant could return to work on May 3, 2021. The employer called him back on April 28, 2021, and informed him that he was terminated because he had received too many points according to their attendance policy.

The employer was present and no policy was presented during the hearing. Claimant was aware that he needed to call in at least an hour before his shift and he acknowledges he received the call in policy and the attendance policy when he was hired. Claimant was not aware that his job was in jeopardy. Claimant had not received a written warning regarding his absenteeism.

## REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

For the reasons that follow, the administrative law judge concludes the claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason.

Iowa Code § 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.

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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 Dep't of Job Serv.*, 275 N.W.2d 445, 448 (Iowa 1979).

Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(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 employer has the burden to prove the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. *Cosper v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). 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). Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due to properly reported illness cannot constitute work-connected misconduct since they are not volitional, 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. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7); *Cosper*, supra; *Gaborit v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 734 N.W.2d 554 (Iowa Ct. App. 2007). Medical documentation is not essential to a determination that an absence due to illness should be treated as excused. *Gaborit*, supra.

The requirements for a finding of misconduct based on absences are therefore twofold. First, the absences must be excessive. *Sallis v. Emp't Appeal Bd.*, 437 N.W.2d 895 (Iowa 1989). The determination of whether unexcused absenteeism is excessive necessarily requires consideration of past acts and warnings. *Higgins* at 192. Second, the absences must be unexcused. *Cosper* at 10. The requirement of "unexcused" can be satisfied in two ways. An absence can be unexcused either because it was not for "reasonable grounds," *Higgins* at 191, or because it was not "properly reported," holding excused absences are those "with appropriate notice." *Cosper* at 10.

An employer's no-fault absenteeism policy or point system is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for unemployment insurance benefits. A properly reported absence related to illness or injury is excused for the purpose of Iowa Employment Security Law because it is not volitional. Excessive absences are not necessarily unexcused. Absences must be both excessive and unexcused to result in a finding of misconduct. A failure to report to work without notification to the employer is generally considered an unexcused absence. In this case the claimant was ill for three days in a row. The claimant properly reported the absences on April 26, 2021 and April 27, 2021. The claimant's last absence was related to illness but it was not properly reported before his shift. However, one unexcused absence is not disqualifying since it does not meet the excessiveness standard. Because his absences were otherwise related to properly reported illness or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of excessive unexcused absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct and no disqualification is imposed. Accordingly, benefits are allowed.

**DECISION:**

The August 6, 2021, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is REVERSED. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carly Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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Carly Smith  
Administrative Law Judge  
Unemployment Insurance Appeals Bureau

October 6, 2021  
Decision Dated and Mailed

cs/mh