

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

TODD E SCHRIEVER
Claimant

MACHINE TOOL ENGINEERING INC
Employer

APPEAL 17A-UI-10327-LJ-T
**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

OC: 09/10/17
Claimant: Respondent (1)

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct
Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism
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:

The employer filed an appeal from the October 5, 2017 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that allowed benefits based upon a determination that claimant was discharged from employment while on an approved leave of absence. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on October 25, 2017. The claimant, Todd Schriever, participated. The employer, Machine Tool Engineering, Inc., participated through Kari Unga, Office Manager/HR; and Kurt George, Vice President. Employer's Exhibit 1 was received and admitted into the record without objection. The administrative law judge took official notice of the administrative record.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?
Has the claimant been overpaid unemployment insurance benefits, and if so, can the repayment of those benefits to the agency be waived?
Can charges to the employer's account be waived?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed full time, most recently as a shipping and receiving lead, from March 21, 2001, until August 8, 2017, when he was discharged. Claimant last reported to work on March 24, 2017. Over the weekend following that shift, claimant sustained an injury and had to be hospitalized. His wife contacted the employer to report that he needed to have a toe amputated. Claimant provided the employer with weekly updates on his health condition. He spoke directly with Brian Ross, Operations Manager. On May 22, claimant reported that he would be off work until further notice. Additionally, claimant provided the employer with a doctor's note on July 7, documenting his excused absence. On August 8, the employer mailed claimant a letter ending his employment. The employer was experiencing a slow-down in

business, and it could no longer hold open a position for claimant. Claimant had not received any warnings for his attendance, and he was not aware that his employment was in jeopardy.

The administrative record reflects that claimant has received unemployment benefits in the amount of \$1,990.00, since filing a claim with an effective date of September 10, 2017, for the five weeks ending October 14, 2017. The administrative record also establishes that the employer did participate in the fact-finding interview. Unga personally participated in the fact-finding interview, and the employer also submitted documentation.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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

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(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. 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. Iowa Admin. Code r. 871-24.32(7) (emphasis added);

see *Higgins v. Iowa Dep't of Job Serv.*, 350 N.W.2d 187, 190, n. 1 (Iowa 1984) holding “rule [2]4.32(7)...accurately states the law.”

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.

The employer has not established that claimant had excessive absences which would be considered unexcused for purposes of unemployment insurance eligibility. During claimant's months-long absence, he maintained weekly contact with the employer. He also provided them with a doctor's note documenting the absence. The employer never alerted him that his employment was in jeopardy because of his attendance, and it never indicated that claimant was not properly reporting his absences. Because claimant's last absence was related to properly reported illness or other reasonable grounds, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism occurred which establishes work-connected misconduct. Accordingly, benefits are allowed. As claimant's separation from employment is not disqualifying, the issues of overpayment, repayment, and chargeability are moot.

DECISION:

The October 5, 2017 (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision is affirmed. Claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided he is otherwise eligible. The issues of overpayment, repayment, and chargeability are moot.

Elizabeth A. Johnson
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

lj/scn