

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

68-0157 (9-06) - 3091078 - EI

**LINDSEY J DEN OUDEN**  
Claimant

**APPEAL NO: 07A-UI-10163-LT**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**NUTRA FLO COMPANY**  
Employer

**OC: 09/30/07 R: 01  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge/Misconduct  
871 IAC 24.32(7) – Excessive Unexcused Absenteeism

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

The claimant filed a timely appeal from the October 23, 2007, reference 01, decision that denied benefits. After due notice was issued, a telephone conference hearing was held on November 20, 2007. Claimant participated. Employer participated through Jean Holbrook and Laorna Puntillo. Employer's Exhibit 1 was received.

**ISSUE:**

The issue is whether claimant was discharged for reasons related to job misconduct sufficient to warrant a denial of unemployment benefits.

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having heard the testimony and having reviewed the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed as a full time clerk from October 23, 2006 until September 28, 2007 when she was discharged. She was absent on September 25 due to reported asthma and morning sickness related to her pregnancy. Her last absence occurred on September 26 when she was involved in a car accident on the way to work. She reported the absence and was examined by a physician to verify the pregnancy was healthy. She returned to work on September 27 and worked the entire shift before being fired on the 28th.

**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.

871 IAC 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.

Excessive absences are not considered misconduct unless unexcused. Absences due to properly reported illness or injury cannot constitute job misconduct since they are not volitional. *Cosper v. Iowa Department of Job Service*, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982).

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, employer incurs potential liability for unemployment insurance benefits related to that separation. In the case of an illness, it would seem reasonable that employer would not want an employee to report to work if they are at risk of infecting other employees or customers. Certainly, an employee who is ill or injured is not able to perform their job at peak levels. A reported absence related to illness or injury is excused for the purpose of the Iowa Employment Security Act. An employer's point system or no-fault absenteeism policy is not dispositive of the issue of qualification for benefits. Because the final absence for which she was discharged was related to properly reported illness, no final or current incident of unexcused absenteeism has been established and no disqualification is imposed.

**DECISION:**

The October 23, 2007, reference 01, decision is reversed. The claimant was discharged from employment for no disqualifying reason. Benefits are allowed, provided the claimant is otherwise eligible.

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Dévon M. Lewis  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

dml/pjs