

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS BUREAU**

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**JUANITA C CARTER**  
Claimant

**APPEAL 17A-UI-12564-NM-T**

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE  
DECISION**

**FERRARA CANDY COMPANY**  
Employer

**OC: 11/19/17  
Claimant: Appellant (2)**

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Iowa Code § 96.5(2)a – Discharge for Misconduct

**STATEMENT OF THE CASE:**

The claimant filed an appeal from the December 5, 2017, (reference 01) unemployment insurance decision that denied benefits based on her discharge for excessive unexcused absenteeism. The parties were properly notified of the hearing. A telephone hearing was held on December 28, 2017. The claimant participated and testified. The employer did not participate.

**ISSUE:**

Was the claimant discharged for disqualifying job-related misconduct?

**FINDINGS OF FACT:**

Having reviewed all of the evidence in the record, the administrative law judge finds: Claimant was employed full time as a kitchen operator from March 20, 2017, until this employment ended on November 10, 2017, when she was discharged.

On October 26, 2017, claimant had been approved to only work a half day so she could attend a doctor's appointment. Sometime after claimant left work for the day a list was posted for employees who were required to work overtime the following morning. Claimant's name was on that list, though she did not know that, as she had already left for the day. Claimant testified it was the employer's general practice not to assign overtime to anyone who was not at work when the list was posted. On October 27, 2017, claimant showed up to work at her normal start time and was informed for the first time that she was supposed to have come into work early for mandatory overtime. Claimant explained she had left early the previous day and was therefore unaware of the overtime, but was assessed a point nevertheless. That absence put claimant at eight attendance points. She was subsequently discharged under the employer's attendance policy, which only allows eight points within a rolling 12-month period.

**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. Absences related to issues of personal responsibility such as transportation, lack of childcare, and oversleeping are not considered excused. *Higgins, supra*.

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, injury, or other reasonable grounds 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. However, one unexcused absence is not disqualifying since it does not meet the excessiveness standard. Here, claimant's final absence occurred on October 27, 2017, when she missed mandatory overtime. Claimant missed the mandatory overtime because the schedule was posted after she had left work early for the day for a pre-approved doctor's appointment. Claimant cannot reasonably be expected to show up for a shift that she was given no notice she was required to work. Because her final 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. Since the employer has not established a current or final act of misconduct, without such, the history of other incidents need not be examined. Accordingly, benefits are allowed.

**DECISION:**

The December 5, 2017, (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. Benefits withheld based upon this separation shall be paid to claimant.

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Nicole Merrill  
Administrative Law Judge

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Decision Dated and Mailed

nm/rvs