

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

THOMAS P JEFFERSON  
2830 E 4<sup>TH</sup> ST  
WATERLOO IA 50703

EAGLE OTTAWA LLC  
4455 REMINGTON RD  
WATERLOO IA 50703

Appeal Number: 04A-UI-11055-BT  
OC: 09/19/04 R: 03  
Claimant: Appellant (1)

**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, 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

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(Administrative Law Judge)

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(Decision Dated & Mailed)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge for Misconduct

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Thomas Jefferson (claimant) appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated October 8, 2004, reference 01, which held that he was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits because he was discharged from Eagle Ottawa (employer) for work-connected misconduct. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on November 4, 2004. The claimant participated in the hearing with Garth Bowen, Union Representative. The employer participated through Lance Dunn, Human Resources Manager.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The administrative law judge, having heard the testimony and considered all of the evidence in the record, finds that: The claimant was employed as a full-time production worker from September 24, 1997 through September 17, 2004. He was discharged for violating the zero tolerance violence policy. The employer's policies are posted. On September 13, 2004, another employee was splashing hot water onto the claimant. The claimant walked around to the other side of the table to confront the employee as to why the employee was splashing water on him. The co-employee pushed the claimant twice and the claimant hit the co-employee. The claimant stated the co-employee raised his hand with a stick in it and the claimant tried to defend himself by hitting "him before he hit me."

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue is whether the employer discharged the claimant for work-connected misconduct. 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 Section 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).

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 Department of Job Service, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The propriety of a discharge is not at issue in an unemployment insurance case. An employer may be justified in discharging an employee, but the employee's conduct may not amount to misconduct precluding the payment of unemployment compensation. The law limits disqualifying misconduct to substantial and willful wrongdoing or repeated carelessness or negligence that equals willful misconduct in culpability. Lee v. Employment Appeal Board, 616 N.W.2d 661, 665 (Iowa 2000).

The claimant was discharged for violating the employer's zero tolerance workplace violence policy by fighting on the job on September 13, 2004. He contends he was defending himself although he admitted he could have contacted a supervisor before he walked around the table that night to confront his co-employee for throwing hot water on him. In order to establish the claimant acted out of self-defense, he would need to show freedom from fault, a necessity to fight back and an attempt to retreat. Savage v. Employment Appeal Board, 529 N.W.2d 640 (Iowa App. 1995). Although the claimant did not initiate the problem, the evidence is clear that there was no necessity to fight back and that no attempt to retreat was made since the claimant wanted to "hit him before he hit me." Work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law has been established in this case and benefits are denied.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated October 8, 2004, reference 01, is affirmed. The claimant is not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits because he was discharged from work for misconduct. Benefits are withheld until he has worked in and been paid wages for insured work equal to ten times his weekly benefit amount provided he is otherwise eligible.

sdb/kjf