

**IOWA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPEALS**

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

ANGELA M NEEF

Claimant

APPEAL NO: 08A-UI-01229-DT

**ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE
DECISION**

CARGILL MEAT SOLUTIONS CORP

Employer

**OC: 01/06/08 R: 03
Claimant: Respondent (1)**

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge

Section 96.7-2-a(2) – Charges Against Employer's Account

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Cargill Meat Solutions Corporation (employer) appealed a representative's January 24, 2008 decision (reference 01) that concluded Angela M. Neef (claimant) was qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment. After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on February 19, 2008. The claimant participated in the hearing. Katie Holcomb appeared on the employer's behalf and presented testimony from one other witness, Charles Heisel. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the parties, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUES:

Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct? Is the employer's account subject to charge?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant started working for the employer on October 2, 2007. She worked full time as a general worker in the boxing/bagging area of the employer's Wapello County, Iowa pork processing plant. Her last day of work was December 8, 2007. The employer discharged her on that date. The reason asserted for the discharge was writing on a fist-sized piece of trim (fat) with a permanent non-edible marker.

On December 8 the claimant was working on a line bagging ribs. Mr. Heisel saw the claimant take a black permanent non-edible marker and write "Hi" on a stray piece of trim that had inadvertently come down the line and which she then left on the line to go further on down the line. She had received a similarly marked piece of trim from someone further up the line earlier that day. The claimant had believed the piece of trim was inedible and would eventually be disposed of in a "gray barrel." However, since it had otherwise not been contaminated by falling on the floor or otherwise, the trim actually should have been placed in a "white barrel" and sent back for trim blending. The claimant's writing on the trim did contaminate it and caused it to be

lost to further processing. The employer discharged the claimant for sabotage of company product.

The claimant established an unemployment insurance benefit year effective January 6, 2008.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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 § 96.5-2-a. Before a claimant can be denied unemployment insurance benefits, the employer has the burden to establish the claimant was discharged for work-connected misconduct. Cosper v. IDJS, 321 N.W.2d 6 (Iowa 1982). The question is not whether the employer was right to terminate the claimant's employment, but whether the claimant is entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. Infante v. IDJS, 364 N.W.2d 262 (Iowa App. 1984). What constitutes misconduct justifying termination of an employee and what is misconduct that warrants denial of unemployment insurance benefits are two separate matters. Pierce v. IDJS, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988).

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(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.

The focus of the definition of misconduct is on acts or omissions by a claimant that “rise to the level of being deliberate, intentional or culpable.” Henry v. Iowa Department of Job Service, 391 N.W.2d 731, 735 (Iowa App. 1986). The acts must show:

1. Willful and wanton disregard of an employer’s interest, such as found in:
 - a. Deliberate violation of standards of behavior that the employer has the right to expect of its employees, or
 - b. Deliberate disregard of standards of behavior the employer has the right to expect of its employees; or
2. Carelessness or negligence of such degree of recurrence as to:
 - a. Manifest equal culpability, wrongful intent or evil design; or
 - b. Show an intentional and substantial disregard of:
 1. The employer’s interest, or
 2. The employee’s duties and obligations to the employer.

Henry, supra.

The reason cited by the employer for discharging the claimant is her writing on the piece of trim causing it to be contaminated and lost to further production. Misconduct connotes volition. Huntoon, supra. Under the circumstances of this case, the claimant’s writing on the trim that she believed was already going to be disposed of was the result of inefficiency, unsatisfactory conduct, inadvertence, or ordinary negligence in an isolated instance, and was a good faith error in judgment or discretion. The employer has not met its burden to show disqualifying misconduct. Cosper, supra. Based upon the evidence provided, the claimant’s actions were not misconduct within the meaning of the statute, and the claimant is not disqualified from benefits.

The final issue is whether the employer’s account is subject to charge. An employer’s account is only chargeable if the employer is a base period employer. Iowa Code § 96.7. The base period is “the period beginning with the first day of the five completed calendar quarters immediately preceding the first day of an individual’s benefit year and ending with the last day of the next to the last completed calendar quarter immediately preceding the date on which the individual filed a valid claim.” Iowa Code § 96.19-3. The claimant’s base period began October 1, 2006 and ended September 30, 2007. The employer did not employ the claimant during this time, and therefore the employer is not currently a base period employer and its account is not currently chargeable for benefits paid to the claimant.

DECISION:

The representative’s January 24, 2008 decision (reference 01) is affirmed. The employer did discharge the claimant but not for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is qualified to receive

unemployment insurance benefits, if she is otherwise eligible. The employer's account is not subject to charge in the current benefit year.

Lynette A. F. Donner
Administrative Law Judge

Decision Dated and Mailed

ld/pjs