

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

DAPHNIE C WALKER
219 WEBSTER ST
WATERLOO IA 50703

TYSON FRESH MEATS INC
c/o TALX UC EXPRESS
PO BOX 283
ST LOUIS MO 63166-0283

Appeal Number: 04A-UI-01756-DT
OC: 01/04/04 R: 03
Claimant: Respondent (2)

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, 4th 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.

(Administrative Law Judge)

(Decision Dated & Mailed)

871 IAC 26.14(7) – Late Call
Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge
Section 96.3-7 – Recovery of Overpayment of Benefits

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc. (employer) appealed a representative's February 10, 2004 decision (reference 01) that concluded Daphnie C. Walker (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 March 9, 2004. The claimant failed to respond to the hearing notice and provide a telephone number at which she could be reached for the hearing and did not participate in the hearing. Dave Duncan appeared on the employer's behalf. The record was closed at 10:45 a.m. At 3:38 p.m., the claimant called the Appeals Section and requested that the record be reopened.

Based on the evidence, the arguments of the employer, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE: Should the hearing record be reopened? Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant received the hearing notice prior to the March 9, 2004 hearing. The instructions inform the parties that if the party does not contact the Appeals Section and provide the phone number at which the party can be contacted for the hearing, the party will not be called for the hearing. The first time the claimant directly contacted the Appeals Section was on March 9, 2004, over five hours after the scheduled start time for the hearing. The claimant had not read all the information on the hearing notice, and had believed that she was supposed to call the Appeals Section at the time for the hearing. However, at the scheduled time for the hearing the claimant was asleep because she said it had been her birthday the day before, and that on the day of the hearing she had a hangover and did not wake up until she called the Appeals Section.

The claimant started working for the employer on June 24, 2003. She worked full time as an hourly production worker at the employer's Waterloo, Iowa meat processing facility. Her last day of work was October 17, 2003. The employer discharged her on October 20, 2003. The stated reason for the discharge was falsifying attendance documentation.

The claimant had been absent from work on October 13 through October 16. She returned to work on October 17. She presented a doctor's excuse that appeared to excuse her from work for all of these days. However, upon examination of the excuse, the employer determined that the excuse had been altered to extend the time covered by the excuse to include October 16 when originally it had only covered through October 15. The employer contacted the doctor's office, which verified that it had not authorized the extension of the excuse to include October 16. When confronted, the claimant acknowledged that she had modified the excuse because she had determined she needed to take off the additional day. The claimant was on notice of the employer's policy that provides for discharge for altering attendance documentation.

The claimant established a claim for unemployment insurance benefits effective January 4, 2004. The claimant has received unemployment insurance benefits after the separation from employment in the amount of \$324.00.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The first issue in this case is whether the claimant's request to reopen the hearing should be granted or denied.

871 IAC 26.14(7) provides:

(7) If a party has not responded to a notice of telephone hearing by providing the appeals section with the names and telephone numbers of its witnesses by the scheduled time of the hearing, the presiding officer may proceed with the hearing.

- a. If an absent party responds to the hearing notice while the hearing is in progress, the presiding officer shall pause to admit the party, summarize the hearing to that point, administer the oath, and resume the hearing.
- b. If a party responds to the notice of hearing after the record has been closed and any party which has participated is no longer on the telephone line, the presiding officer shall not take the evidence of the late party. Instead, the presiding officer shall inquire as to why the party was late in responding to the notice of hearing. For good cause shown, the presiding officer shall reopen the record and cause further notice of hearing to be issued to all parties of record. The record shall not be reopened if the presiding officer does not find good cause for the party's late response to the notice of hearing.
- c. Failure to read or follow the instructions on the notice of hearing shall not constitute good cause for reopening the record.

The first time the claimant called the Appeals Section for the March 9, 2004 hearing was after the hearing had been closed. Although the claimant intended to participate in the hearing, the claimant failed to read or follow the hearing notice instructions and did not contact the Appeals Section prior to the hearing nor even at the time for the hearing. The rule specifically states that failure to read or follow the instructions on the hearing notice does not constitute good cause to reopen the hearing. Being asleep at the scheduled time for the hearing, particularly due to a hangover, is not good cause. The claimant did not establish good cause to reopen the hearing. Therefore, the claimant's request to reopen the hearing is denied.

The issue in this case is whether the employer discharged the claimant for reasons establishing work-connected misconduct. The issue is not whether the employer was right or even had any other choice but 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 decisions. Pierce v. IDJS, 425 N.W.2d 679 (Iowa App. 1988). 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. 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); 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 claimant's alteration of the doctor's excuse shows a willful or wanton disregard of the standard of behavior the employer has the right to expect from an employee, as well as an intentional and substantial disregard of the employer's interests and of the employee's duties and obligations to the employer. The employer discharged the claimant for reasons amounting to work-connected misconduct.

Iowa Code Section 96.3-7 provides:

7. Recovery of overpayment of benefits. If an individual receives benefits for which the individual is subsequently determined to be ineligible, even though the individual acts in good faith and is not otherwise at fault, the benefits shall be recovered. The department in its discretion may recover the overpayment of benefits either by having a sum equal to the overpayment deducted from any future benefits payable to the individual or by having the individual pay to the department a sum equal to the overpayment.

If the department determines that an overpayment has been made, the charge for the overpayment against the employer's account shall be removed and the account shall be credited with an amount equal to the overpayment from the unemployment compensation trust fund and this credit shall include both contributory and reimbursable employers, notwithstanding section 96.8, subsection 5.

Because the claimant's separation was disqualifying, benefits were paid to which the claimant was not entitled. Those benefits must be recovered in accordance with the provisions of Iowa law.

DECISION:

The representative's February 10, 2004 decision (reference 01) is reversed. The employer discharged the claimant for disqualifying reasons. The claimant is disqualified from receiving unemployment insurance benefits as of October 17, 2003. This disqualification continues until the claimant has been paid ten times her weekly benefit amount for insured work, provided she

is otherwise eligible. The employer's account will not be charged. The claimant is overpaid benefits in the amount of \$324.00.

ld/kjf