

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

CHER L CASILLAS
1110 E 2ND ST
OTTUMWA IA 52501

OTTUMWA DEVELOPMENTS INC
OTTUMWA MANOR
927 E PENN AVE
OTTUMWA IA 52501

Appeal Number: 04A-UI-12662-DT
OC: 11/07/04 R: 03
Claimant: Appellant (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)

Section 96.5-2-a – Discharge

STATEMENT OF THE CASE:

Cher L. Casillas (claimant) appealed a representative's November 24, 2004 decision (reference 01) that concluded she was not qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits after a separation from employment from Ottumwa Developments, Inc. (employer). After hearing notices were mailed to the parties' last-known addresses of record, a telephone hearing was held on December 20, 2004. The claimant participated in the hearing. The employer failed to respond to the hearing notice and provide a telephone number at which a representative could be reached for the hearing and did not participate in the hearing. Based on the evidence, the arguments of the claimant, and the law, the administrative law judge enters the following findings of fact, reasoning and conclusions of law, and decision.

ISSUE:

Was the claimant discharged for work-connected misconduct?

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant started working for the employer on January 7, 2002. She worked full time as a certified nursing aide (CNA) in the employer's long-term care nursing facility. Her last day of work was November 4, 2004. The employer discharged her on November 5, 2004. The reason asserted for the discharge was excessive absenteeism.

On November 5, 2004 the claimant was scheduled to work from 6:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Before 6:00 a.m., the claimant had called the employer and reported that she would be a little late for work, as she was having cramps and could not drive, and so was getting a ride from a friend. After the friend picked up the claimant, the car they were driving in was rear-ended by another car. Neither driver was insured, so neither of them reported the accident to the police or to insurance. After the accident, the claimant's back was out of alignment. She called the employer again to report that she would not be in to work that day as she needed to go to the doctor due to the back pain.

The claimant went to a chiropractor at approximately noon that same day. The chiropractor confirmed that her back was out of alignment due to the car accident. She was told to stay off work that day and the next. She returned to the chiropractor for another adjustment on November 6. Upon returning home from the chiropractor's visit on November 5, the claimant again called the employer to report the doctor's findings and recommendations. She was told that she was discharged because the employer could find no verification that there had been an accident and because she had missed too many days. The claimant asserted that she had not been absent any days for which she did not have a doctor's excuse.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

The issue in this case is whether the employer discharged the claimant for reasons establishing work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law. The issue 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 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 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).

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.

Absenteeism can constitute misconduct, however, to be misconduct, absences must be both excessive and unexcused. A determination as to whether an absence is excused or unexcused does not rest solely on the interpretation or application of the employer's attendance policy. 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 for the absence under its attendance policy. Cosper, supra. Because the 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 and no disqualification is imposed. Further, the employer has not established that the claimant had prior excessive unexcused absences. The employer has failed to meet its burden to establish misconduct. Cosper, supra. The claimant's actions were not misconduct within the meaning of the statute, and the claimant is not disqualified from benefits.

DECISION:

The representative's November 24, 2004 decision (reference 01) is reversed. 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.

ld/pjs