

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

FERNANDO MEJIA
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SCHNEIDER NATIONAL CARRIERS INC
c/o TALX UC EXPRESS
PO BOX 283
ST LOUIS MO 63166-0283

Appeal Number: 05A-UI-03033-SWT
OC: 02/13/05 R: 04
Claimant: Respondent (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, 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:

The employer appealed an unemployment insurance decision dated March 11, 2005, reference 01, that concluded the claimant's discharge was not for work-connected misconduct. A telephone hearing was scheduled for April 20, 2005. The claimant participated in the hearing. Carrie Benedict participated on behalf of the employer.

FINDINGS OF FACT:

The claimant worked full time for the employer as a truck driver from March 22, 2002, to February 15, 2005. On January 22, 2005, the claimant was driving in icy road conditions and his truck slid into the ditch and onto its side. Because the claimant had previous accidents and the employer considered them preventable, the claimant was warned that his job was in jeopardy and he was subject to discharge if he had any further accidents.

On February 9, 2005, the claimant was negotiating a turn into a parking lot requiring a buttonhook turn in which the tractor turns over in the left-hand lane and then right to make sure the trailer does not hit the curb. As the claimant was pulling into the parking lot, a car struck the right side of his truck. The claimant followed the proper procedure, signaled, and kept a proper lookout in turning.

As a result of the accident, the employer required the claimant to undergo an evaluation of his driving skills by a driver trainer. The driver trainer rated the claimant as deficient in some driving skills. As a result of the claimant's past accidents and driving skill evaluation, the employer discharged him on February 15, 2005.

REASONING AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

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

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(8) provides:

(8) Past acts of misconduct. While past acts and warnings can be used to determine the magnitude of a current act of misconduct, a discharge for misconduct cannot be based on such past act or acts. The termination of employment must be based on a current act.

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).

While the employer may have been justified in discharging the claimant, work-connected misconduct as defined by the unemployment insurance law has not been established in this case. The employer had not proven the final accident was due to any deliberate or even negligent conduct by the claimant. His failure to meet the trainer's driving skill standards is likewise not disqualifying misconduct.

DECISION:

The unemployment insurance decision dated March 11, 2005, reference 01, is affirmed. The claimant is qualified to receive unemployment insurance benefits, if he is otherwise eligible.

saw/sc