

STEPS TO DEVELOP AN EARLY RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM

1. Establish a written policy mandating an Early Return-to-Work program

The first step is to develop a policy statement that conveys to all employees what their rights and responsibilities are in case of an injury or illness. Senior management should endorse this policy and summarize its objectives.

Program duration: The Early Return-to-Work program should not exceed 180 days. Without a program duration clause, you may encounter ADA issues with permanent, modified work that you cannot afford. With a duration clause, all employees will know that the assignment will not be permanent.

2. Designate a key individual to coordinate the Early Return-to-Work program

The program coordinator is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the Early Return-to-Work program in addition to promptly reporting the claims to the insurance carrier. This individual may be someone with a background in risk management, human resources or safety.

3. Educate managers, supervisors, and employees about the Early Return-to-Work program

Managers need to be trained to ensure that the goals of your program are achieved. Communication and training are critical to the success of the program. All participants need to understand their roles and responsibilities.

4. Prepare a job description for each job title

The physical demands of a job must be known so that a physician can easily determine the employee's ability to do his/her job. The descriptions should identify the functional characteristics of the job, physical demands, frequency of tasks, required skills and what equipment and tools are needed for the job.

5. Identify alternative job duties

Alternative job duties enable the eligible injured worker to be immediately assigned to temporary, transitional assignments, hopefully without any time lost from work. The program coordinator should solicit ideas from supervisors and employees to identify those activities that add value:

- Ask for input from employees regarding modified work opportunities. Develop a list of different jobs that could potentially be done by an injured worker. Try not

to focus on the types of injuries that may occur, but rather on duties that can be performed.

- Ensure that the modified work is meaningful and a value to the organization. It must meet the employee's medical restrictions and physical limitations.
- Consider using outside resources to help identify modified work within the organization. Work together with other employers in your industry to come up with modified work plans.
- Observe employee's job tasks and note the physical demands of each. Then determine how they could be changed to accommodate an injured employee and document this information. Changes could include a decrease in the number of hours worked.

6. Designate a preferred Medical Provider Network (MPN)

Preferred medical provider networks should be selected to ensure prompt quality medical care for injured workers. The network must have a willingness to work with the employer and the workers' compensation carrier regarding your Early Return-to-Work program. A tour of the MPN facility by you would be beneficial, and gives you an opportunity to express your needs.

7. Review the program on a scheduled basis

To ensure the program is effective, an annual review is needed to update or revise the program. The review should be initiated by the Program Coordinator with input from all parties involved in the Early Return-to-Work program.

EARLY RETURN-TO-WORK PROCEDURES

1. Establish an Early Return-to-Work coordinator.
2. Employees must report all injuries to his/her manager immediately following an injury. The manager will then report the injury to the Early Return-to-Work coordinator. This should be accomplished within 24 hours.
3. The paperwork below must be completed and, if necessary, assistance given to your employee to complete it. All appropriate information will be submitted to the insurance carrier to initiate a claim.
 - Employer's First Report of Injury
 - Workers' Compensation Claim Form
 - Accident Investigation
4. The injured worker will be given the "Employee's Roles & Responsibilities" form to read, sign and return to their manager. The manager will give it to the Early Return-to-Work coordinator.
5. The employee will be directed to the designated occupational medical clinic (within your MPN) for treatment.
6. A copy of the Job Description and Physical Capabilities Form must be sent to the treating doctor by the Early Return-to-Work coordinator if the employee is unable to return to work.
7. While off work with an injury, the employee must contact the Early Return-to-Work coordinator to report his/her return to work status after each doctor visit.
8. Upon receipt of a modified/limited duty work status form, the Early Return-to-Work coordinator and the employee's manager will work together to identify a temporary, transitional work assignment.
9. The injured worker will be assigned temporary, transitional work according to the restrictions by the treating physician (MPN). The business needs of the company at the time of the employee's release to modified work must be considered by you. The assignment may be in a different department or on a different shift than worked at the time of injury. Transitional jobs are temporary in nature. They are intended to ease the employee back to regular duty. The transitional work will be monitored by the employee's manager on an on-going basis. The assignment will be changed as the work restrictions are adjusted. The transitional job assignment will not exceed 180 days unless approved by management.

10. When the treating doctor gives a release to temporary, transitional work, a job offer letter may be given to the employee in person or mailed by Certified Mail with a written response to your offer requested from the employee.
11. The transitional job will end when one of the following occurs first:
 - The injured worker is released to full duty
 - The injured worker returns to a job that is not part of the Early Return-to-Work program
 - The transitional job is no longer available or has not been extended under the terms of the program (180 days).
12. Should the injured worker be given permanent restrictions by his/her treating physician, each case will be reviewed individually outside the Early Return-to-Work program and in accordance with all State and Federal guidelines.
13. You need to evaluate the program on a quarterly basis and make adjustments as needed to be successful.

EMPLOYEE'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Immediately report all injuries to your manager/supervisor. Failure to report injuries may result in delay or loss of benefits.
2. Complete all necessary paperwork including the Workers' Compensation Claim Form (Form DWC1).
3. Seek medical treatment from the company's designated Medical Provider Network (MPN). Any injury requiring urgent emergency care should be treated at the nearest hospital emergency room (MPN) immediately following the injury.
4. Follow established policies and procedures:
 - a. Immediately telephone your manager/supervisor should the doctor restrict you from regular duties.
 - b. Provide a copy of work status letter or form to your manager/supervisor following each medical appointment.
 - c. Remain accessible to phone calls from your employer while at home.
 - d. Schedule medical appointments around work schedule to avoid loss of earning power. If this cannot be arranged, appointments should be made at the beginning or at the end of the work day.
5. Maintain contact with your manager/supervisor and Early Return-to-Work coordinator:
 - a. Notify manager/supervisor of medical appointments in advance.
 - b. If unable to report to work for any reason, notify your manager/supervisor as soon as possible and prior to the start of your scheduled work shift.
 - c. Immediately report any changes in your health status to the company.
6. Follow your physician's directions and treatment plan.
7. Do not work beyond the physical limitations set by your treating physician.
8. Abide by all safety rules and procedures.

Transitional, Light & Modified Tasks that can be Performed in the Office, Shop or Field

Clerical/Administrative Tasks	Office	Shop	Field
Attend educational and training classes	x		
Data entry	x		
Dispatch assistant	x		
Filing, photocopy, shredding	x		
Front desk assistant: answer phones, sort & distribute mail, stuff envelopes	x		
Light stocking of bathroom and office supplies	x		
Order supplies	x	x	x
Organize shelves	x	x	
Place purchase orders by phone, fax or e-mail	x	x	x
Put together employee packets	x		
Train new employees	x	x	x
Update job descriptions	x	x	x
Volunteer at a local charity	x		
Safety Related Tasks	Office	Shop	Field
Attend safety seminars or complete on-line safety training	x		
Check and repair safety equipment (fire extinguishers and smoke detectors)	x	x	x
Compile and update safety manuals and MSDS sheets	x	x	x
Conduct job site, building, vehicle or other safety inspection	x	x	x
Inspect flooring for need for maintenance of cleaning	x	x	x
Job Safety Monitor			x
Replenish first aid kits	x	x	x
Shop & Field Tasks	Office	Shop	Field
Act as "gofer" at job sites			x
Assistant field employees with supplies			x
Assist in survey work			x
Flagging			x
Fueling equipment		x	x
Inventory parts, supplies, and/or tools		x	x
Light pick-up at job site			x
Maintain equipment		x	x
Operate forklift		x	x
Perform quality control inspections			x
Retrieve from, or hand tools to individuals in the field			x
Run light errands and pick up supplies		x	x
Security guard			x
Tagging loads			x
Tool room/storage checkout			x
Traffic control			x
Train new employees	x	x	x
Clean-Up Tasks	Office	Shop	Field
Clean break rooms, restrooms and/or shop	x	x	
Clean, inspect, sort and sharpen tools		x	
Light surface cleaning or counters, phones, and computers	x	x	
Sweep		x	x
Wash and clean company vehicles		x	
Wash windows	x	x	