

# RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM

A workplace injury can have a profound effect on both injured workers and your workplace. Injured employees can have the stress of medical expenses, job security and recovery while you struggle with reallocating work responsibilities or replacing an employee. Incorporating a Return-To-Work program that provides your injured employees with modified or alternate duties while they are still recovering can benefit them and lower your workers' comp premiums in the process — a win for everyone.

The purpose of a Return-To-Work program is to establish a process by which an injured employee can perform modified or alternate duties at the workplace while they are working towards returning to their full-time duties. The program also sets up efficient communication between the injured employee, a contact person within your company, the employer and the medical provider. A successful program ensures the injured worker returns to work safely and in a timely manner, your business is able to retain their experienced worker, and costs related to disability and workers' comp can be reduced. But perhaps the most important result of a program is the injured worker's ability to continue meaningful work, which increases their self-worth and can solidify loyalty.

Modified duties are jobs that can be given to injured workers who can perform some of the same or similar

duties that have been modified to accommodate physical limitations.

## EXAMPLES OF MODIFIED DUTIES

- The reduction of an employee's work hours
- An alternative duty that utilizes the employee's work knowledge but does not have the same physical requirements, such as moving a mechanic into a consultant position for other mechanics. The mechanic can continue to use their experience and expertise to give advice and help troubleshoot without doing the heavy lifting.
- Changing the equipment or work methods an employee uses, like moving a worker from an excavator to a water truck.
- Changing the building or location where an employee typically works, for example, moving a health care worker from the patient floor to the main office.

Alternate duties apply to injured workers that can in no way perform their current duties. Alternate duties are often office projects that are not top priorities but can keep a worker active and engaged.

## EXAMPLES OF ALTERNATE DUTIES

- Taking inventory
- Administrative work such as filing
- Organizing storage areas
- Updating job manuals
- Doing minor office repairs

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A Return-To-Work program should be set up before an accident happens so that a plan is in place. When developing a program, an initial meeting with supervisors and managers should be held to identify appropriate options for modified or alternate duties. In addition to this, you should assess each job title and its responsibilities to understand the most common injuries that occur. This analysis can be used to improve safety policies and prevent future injuries. It can also provide important details, such as daily physical requirements to medical providers that are responsible for determining



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what duties are realistic for injured workers to perform.

Another key component of a successful program is appointing an employee who will be in charge of directly handling all injured workers. This point person should be identified based on availability and expertise and will serve as a contact for the injured employee, employer and medical providers.

Once a program is established, all new and existing employees should receive a copy so they understand the process should an injury occur.

All programs should comply with

regulations outlined by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under these acts, injured employees who are classified as having a “serious health condition or disability” may not be allowed to participate in a Return-To-Work program, but for those that can, the result will be a purposeful sense of job security and continued workplace productivity.

For questions or assistance with setting up a Return-To-Work program for your client, please contact our Loss Control department at (225) 389-5822 or [lubalosscontrol@lubawc.com](mailto:lubalosscontrol@lubawc.com).



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