

Employers can help employees return to work after injuries

When an employee is injured at work, it benefits both the employee and the employer to get the employee back to work as soon as possible. A return-to-work plan should be implemented soon after an employee is injured. It should consist of the following five steps:

1. *Report the claim.* Immediately after an employee is injured, submit the claim to your claims administrator. Also, perform an accident investigation to determine the cause and to identify potential safety hazards. If safety hazards exist, take steps to prevent further injuries or losses. Call your CTSI Loss Prevention Specialist if you need assistance.
2. *Initiate contact.* The supervisor should contact the injured worker and his or her doctor to learn more about the employee's condition and work status. Provide the doctor with a description of the worker's job duties and physical job requirements. Ask the doctor what needs to happen for the employee to return to work, either in the original job or a modified job.
3. *Establish modified work.* Have the doctor specify the employee's work capabilities, as permitted by law. With the doctor's help, determine the employee's current functional ability. What kind of work can the employee safely do now? If the worker cannot perform part or all of the original job, you should team up with the doctor, the employee's supervisor and the employee to identify other work the employee can do during the transition. Make everyone involved aware of the goal to return the injured employee to productive work within medical guidelines as soon as possible. Establish a timetable with the doctor for ongoing medical check-ups and for tracking the employee's recovery.
4. *Ramp up for modified work.* Assure the injured worker that the original job will be available when he or she is physically able to perform it again. Meanwhile, offer the worker an appropriate modified work assignment to restore earning capacity, stay engaged in the workplace and gain cross-training opportunities. Emphasize that modified work is temporary, not permanent, and that it enables the employee to make a valuable, immediate contribution to the department. To prepare for modified work, you may need to make adjustments based on the doctor's orders and the employee's input. For example, you can:
 - Change the employee's work duties (e.g., move a data entry clerk to the customer service desk)
 - Change his or her work station (e.g., have him or her flag instead of operating a road grader.)
 - Provide adaptive tools (e.g., provide a chair with an adjustable back to an employee with a back injury)
 - Assign fewer hours
5. *Monitor progress.* Make sure the employee works within the temporary restrictions set by the doctor. Periodically update the claims adjuster on the employee's recovery. During the recovery period, modify job tasks according to the treating doctor's restrictions to help the employee move toward a full return to the original job. Above all, assure the employee that you want him or her back in the original job as soon as he or she is physically able. This sends a clear message that they are a valuable member of your department's team.

Many of these steps also can be applied to employees with non-work injuries to help them return to work safely.

For more information, contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.

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