

Amtrak finds creative solution to help injured employees return to work

Amtrak has come up with a creative solution to get injured workers back to work. Amtrak's innovative program, called *Right Care...Day One*, keeps injured workers active while recovering from an occupational injury or illness.

When an employee is injured on the job, Amtrak first makes sure that he or she gets the best possible medical care. Then, as part of the recovery process, Amtrak tries to place the recovering employee in a temporary return-to-work position within the company. If no suitable positions are available within the company, Amtrak will place the employee in a temporary position with a local non-profit organization.

The employee works as a volunteer for the non-profit until he or she has recovered sufficiently to return to a position at Amtrak. Amtrak continues to pay the employee his or her regular wages while he or she works as a volunteer.

The program has been a success for Amtrak, its employees, and the community. The program has accelerated employee recovery time, improved worker morale, and helped to control workers compensation costs. Amtrak company officials say that the program has reduced the number of lost time days by 51 percent. The charities, which are eager for the extra assistance, say that the Amtrak employees are excellent volunteers and many of the employees continue to volunteer for the charities after they have returned to work.

The Research

Companies have motivation to get injured workers back to work as soon as possible. Studies show that the longer an employee is out of work, the less likely he or she will to return to work. In fact, only 50 percent of employees who are off of work for six months or more will return to work. And only 10 percent of employees who are off for more than a year will return to work.

According to an article in Orthopaedic Forum by J. Mark Melhorn, patients with extended disability are more likely to suffer from depression, are less motivated, and have less favorable medical outcomes than those who participate in early-return-to-work programs. The American Occupational Medical Association's Committee on Practice says that early-return-to-work programs enhance both psychological and physical recovery.

What this Means for Counties

Early return-to-work programs are clearly good for both the employee and the employer. Whether your county prefers an innovative return-to-work program like Amtrak's or a more traditional return-to-work program, your county should have a procedure in place for returning employees to work after they are injured on the job.

CTSI can help you to create return-to-work programs for your recovering employees. For more information, contact CTSI at 303-861-0507.

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