

Return-to-work: A basic policy

A primer on how to design a written program for your organization

Bringing an employee back to work as soon as medically appropriate is not only the right thing to do, but also a good business decision. Through early return-to-work, you can:

- Keep workers' compensation costs down.
- Avoid overtime, hiring and retraining costs.
- Lessen your chances for litigation.

Return-to-work also allows the employee to heal while staying productive and in a working mindset. So not only is it beneficial for employers, but recuperating employees as well.

Solid return-to-work practices are fundamental to managing the costs of workers' compensation claims. SFM takes a proactive approach in helping injured employees return to work. SFM also suggests each employer take at least the four basic steps that help make return-to-work successful.

Your four-step program

- 1. Draft your policy.** This is a statement to your employees expressing your formal commitment to the return-to-work process.
- 2. Appoint a claims coordinator.** This is a specific individual in your organization to coordinate your workers' compensation activities.
- 3. Select a primary care clinic.** You'll want to establish a good working relationship with a designated clinic and suggest that your employees go there. If you need help finding a local clinic that understands occupational medicine and return-to-work, call your SFM claims representative at (800) 937-1181.

- 4. Identify transitional jobs.** Because transitional jobs comply with medical restrictions, they provide opportunities for your employees to return to work even if they are unable to return to their pre-injury positions.

Transitional jobs may include part-time work, existing jobs with different physical requirements, alternated job tasks or modified jobs to accommodate physical limitations. Your claims representative can help you identify transitional jobs. You can also find ideas through the Transitional Work Warehouse on sfmic.com.

Now put your program in writing

Your organization should demonstrate its commitment to return-to work by putting these basic steps in writing. A sample written program covering these four steps is on the back of this sheet. It may help you write one for your organization.

You should also let your employees know about your written return-to-work program. You can do this by giving them copies. Another good idea is to post the written program in a high-traffic area, like the time clock or break room, where your employees can see it.

The "Return-to-work practices" CompTalk explains how to enhance your basic program to make it even more effective. Download or order it from SFM's online resource catalog on sfmic.com. For help developing your program, contact SFM's Loss Prevention Team at (800) 937-1181.

SAMPLE
written program

Return-to-work program

_____ (Your organization's name) _____ supports the practice of bringing injured employees back to work, as soon as they are medically able, to a position in our organization compatible with any physical restrictions they may have. We believe this practice serves the best interests of our employees and organization.

The prompt return of injured employees to positions within their medical restrictions will minimize the impact of work-related injuries. Coming back to work early helps employees remain functional as they recover while providing our organization with the valuable use of employees' talents. It also helps control workers' compensation costs.

If you are injured at work, report the injury to your supervisor immediately — no matter how minor the injury is. You and your supervisor will then call the SFM Work Injury Hotline to report the injury and get a treatment recommendation. Any questions concerning workers' compensation should be directed to this individual.

Claims coordinator _____ **Phone** _____

Your supervisor and/or claims coordinator will help arrange for medical treatment following an injury. Prompt, quality medical treatment can be assured through the use of our primary care clinic.

Clinic _____ **Phone** _____

Current positions may be modified to fit the medical limitations of injured employees by modifying workstations, altering specific tasks or working reduced hours. If this is not possible, temporary transitional jobs may be made available either with your department or through a temporary assignment with another department.

Examples of these transitional jobs or tasks include:

This return-to-work program is an important part of our organization's commitment to manage work-related injuries in a way that's best for our employees and for this organization.

Signature

Title

Date