

# Do's of a Return to Work Program

## **Develop Your Program Jointly**

Return to work programs should be developed cooperatively with representation from the employer, worker and in unionized workplaces with the union. Even when third party services are utilized, workers, unions and managers should be involved. It is also important to include healthcare providers particularly in rural or remote locations.

Keep WCB informed of your program and return to work plans and seek WCB assistance as needed.

## **Be Proactive, Timely and SAFE**

An early and safe return to work is a key component of a worker's recovery and rehabilitation. The longer a worker is away, the less likely it is they will return to work. Return to work must be SAFE and in keeping with the worker's abilities.

## **Define Roles and Responsibilities**

A clear outline of stakeholder roles and responsibilities for both the program and individual plans is essential and should include the employer, worker, union, healthcare providers, the WCB and any other service providers. A successful RTW Program relies on continuous communication and consultation among all the partners.

## **Include the Injured Worker**

The worker's involvement in the development of his/her own individual return to work plan provides a sense of ownership. Workers often have the best ideas in identifying work they can perform while recovering from an injury.

## **Provide Meaningful and Valuable Work**

The tasks and duties contained in an individual return to work plan must be meaningful and productive, and have value to the employer. Work should not be demeaning to the worker. If the value of the work is not readily apparent, this should be explained to the injured worker. Return to work plans should target the worker's pre-injury work. This helps minimize the impact of the injury and reduces disruption for both the worker and the workplace.

## **Apply Your Program to All Workers**

The return to work process should be readily available to all workers regardless of whether they have acquired an illness, a non-work related injury or a WCB claim. This ensures consistent and non-discriminatory practices where employees understand their rights, responsibilities and program expectations.

## **Be Workplace Specific and Workplace Driven**

Every workplace is different; therefore, return to work programs need to be customized to meet the unique and specific needs of the workers and the workplace. Waiting for WCB or another service provider to coordinate or initiate return to work programs means waiting too long.

# Don'ts of a Return to Work Program

## **Use RTW as a Substitute for Prevention**

Disability management and return to work programs start with safety and prevention. Prevention needs to be a priority in the workplace; an equal partner to production and to service. Return to work programs can not compensate for an ineffective safety program.

## **Use RTW as the Primary Strategy to Manage WCB Costs**

The best way to manage WCB costs is through SAFE workplaces with strong injury prevention programs. Other ways to manage costs include understanding WCB programming and policies, working with your Adjudicator and Case Manager and collaborating with your union and workers. When injuries do occur, RTW programs can help minimize costs to the worker and the employer - but this should not be the only strategy to manage WCB premiums.

## **Use RTW as a Punishment for Injury**

Injuries are caused by hazards in the workplace. The focus following an injury should always be on identifying the root cause and taking corrective actions. Blaming the worker for the injury undermines a safety program and creates fear of reporting. Where a worker is blatantly disregarding safety rules, workplace disciplinary actions should take place BEFORE injuries occur.

## **Be So Aggressive as to be Demeaning or Demoralizing for the Workplace**

Return to work programs should be proactive and early intervention is a key to success. Workers are required to participate in suitable and meaningful work which is SAFE. However a return to work program should not be so aggressive that it is disrespectful to the worker and demoralizing for the workplace. For instance, insisting a worker who was in an emergency room until late at night return to work the following morning would be inappropriate and potentially unsafe.

Every workplace is different and personal opinions may differ. Following the key principles of return to work and seeking assistance from WCB in resolving disagreements are important.

## **Use RTW as a Tool to Discourage Medical Treatment or WCB Reporting**

Providing modified duties proactively before injuries or more serious conditions develop is positive and encouraged. Many workplaces have health staff (nurses, OT's, paramedics) on site to provide first aid services, information, or to conduct return to work assessments. Employers are reminded, though, that providing on-site medical assistance does not relieve them of their obligation to report to the WCB whenever there is an injury by accident in the workplace.

Even with these services, a worker should never be discouraged from seeking medical treatment independently of the workplace or for reporting their condition / injury to the WCB.

Discouraging reporting is a form of claim suppression and is against the law.