

KEELSON Safety Summary

RETURN-TO-WORK

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A Return-to-Work Program is designed to bring the injured and disabled employee back to work as rapidly as possible. Program objectives include:

- Accelerate the employee's return to work by addressing the physical, emotional, attitudinal, and environmental factors that otherwise hinder the return-to-work process.
- Facilitate temporary or permanent job reassignment or job restructuring.
- Identify alternative employment consisting of light duty.
- Reduce the employee benefit period of disability.
- Reduce the number of cases entering the workers compensation litigation system.
- Decrease the number of lost work days.
- Increase employee morale and motivation to return and remain at work.
- Assist in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

The Return-to-Work Program consists of an inter-disciplinary team represented by Management (including the Return-to-Work Coordinator, Human Resources Manager and the immediate Supervisor), the insurance carrier (including Medical Case Management, Claims and Loss Control) and the treating physician. Each team representative has specific roles in the return-to-work process.

Management's role in the return-to-work process consists of the following key elements:

- Communication
- Position Description and Job Analysis
- Orientation and Training
- Hazard Identification and Control

The role of the insurance carrier includes:

- Confirmation of the employer's commitment to a Return-to-Work Program.
- Early identification of potential employee candidates for the program.
- Medical documentation of the employee's work potential.
- Management of the employee's medical progress upon return to work.
- Involvement of Medical Case Management specialists in work assessments, and with physicians to obtain work restrictions and determine physical capabilities of the employee. The Medical Case Manager is the liaison between the employee, insurer, physician and the injured worker.
- Evaluation and recommendation of work site and job modifications for restricted or modified jobs.
- Prompt claims payments to the employee.
- Prompt telephone and written communication to employees following request for benefits information.
- Loss control technical assistance in hazard identification and control.

As stated above, hazard identification and control is a management responsibility, but can be supported through the assistance of the insurance carrier loss control specialist. The basic objectives of a hazard identification and control program are to maintain a safe and healthful work environment, reduce or eliminate the risks of occupational injury and illness, and maintain operational profitability for the company.

An important segment of the hazard identification and control program is the Job Hazard Analysis (JHA). The JHA analyzes each step of a job or task to identify safety, health and ergonomic hazards, and develop solutions that will control them.

Facility and work place evaluations represent another important segment. Evaluations are conducted to "detect and correct" hazards and deficiencies, and can be conducted by managers, supervisors, employees, safety committees, and/or technical specialists, such as those representing the insurance carrier.

Control measures include:

- **Engineering Controls** (e.g., ergonomics, machine guarding, isolation).

- **Administrative Controls** (e.g., medical monitoring, selection and screening, training).
- **Personal Controls** (e.g., personal protective equipment).

The role of the treating physician is summarized below:

- Formal review of the employee’s job functions addressed in the position description.
- Defining work restrictions imposed on the employee following job function and position description review.
- Discussion of return-to-work status and restrictions with the employer and the insurance carrier.
- Working with the Medical Case Manager in determining and documenting the employee’s current and future medical status and physical limitations, and overall medical progress.
- Maintenance of physician-employee communication and confidentiality where warranted.
- Physical referral for a more definitive diagnosis when necessary.

When implementing a Return-to Work Program, Management needs to consider the following procedures to effectively return to the injured or disabled employee to productive employment:

1. **Ask** the insurance carrier for assistance throughout the return-to-work process.
2. **Understand** how the workers compensation system works and the effect that injuries and compensation claims can have on profits.
3. **Promote** company-wide cooperation and participation in returning employees to work.
4. **Communicate** with the insurance carrier’s Medical Case Manager and the treating physician regarding the availability of modified or restricted jobs, and for assistance in developing such positions.
5. **Contact** the injured employee immediately following an injury to discuss his/her return-to-work.

For more Information

For more information on “Return-to-Work” or other safety and health issues, contact:

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