

**University of Wisconsin System Administration
Office of Risk Management
Worker's Compensation**

Return to Work Guidelines

Revision November 10, 2014

The timely return of injured employees to productive roles in the workforce is one of the key components of the Worker's Compensation mission. Return to work is a responsibility shared by management and employees.

Bringing an employee back to work early is therapeutic and can speed the overall recovery of the employee injury. The longer an employee is away from work after an injury, the harder it is for them to return to work; and the longer an employee is away from work, the higher the employer's workers compensation costs and related business costs. An effective return to work program can also reduce or eliminate fraudulent claims.

Injured employees who do not return to work are not earning wages, so there are no weekly benefits being paid such as health insurance and retirement. Effectively returning an injured employee back to work reduces employer worker's compensation costs and the employee does not suffer the financial and family consequences of unnecessary lost time.

Return to Work Practices

Employees injured on the job must return to work as soon as medically allowed. Written work restrictions from a medical provider outline the physical limitations for an employee's return to work. Restrictions are in place until the treating physician or independent medical examiner indicates the employee has modified restrictions, or until the employee has reached a plateau in their healing process or "end of healing".

Every employee who has to take days off due to a workplace injury must be notified by their supervisor that they will be expected to return to work within restrictions prescribed by the treating physician or independent medical examination. Each supervisor must provide a welcoming environment for the injured employee returning to work. Supervisors will remain in contact with injured employees who cannot come back to work so as to maintain a positive employer-employee relationship.

Employees returning to work after a work place injury will be assigned job tasks within the prescribed restrictions. With the assistance of the institution risk management team (risk manager, safety officer, worker's compensation coordinator), human resources, and supervisor, the institution will take the necessary steps to find work for the injured employee within the restrictions.

The following progression will be used for prioritizing the placement of an employee returning to work following a workplace injury:

1. Job tasks within the injuring department
2. Job tasks within another department at the institution
3. Job tasks at another state agency or in the community

The wages for the injured employee will be funded by the employee's current employer at the institution regardless of restricted duty placement location.

Workers compensation coordinators (in cooperation with UW System Administration senior workers compensation examiners) will be in regular communication with the treating physicians about when the employee may return to work, the employee restrictions, any modifications over time, and when the employee has reached an end of healing. If at any time there are questions or concerns regarding the treating physician's diagnosis, this team will also determine if an independent medical examination is needed.

The institution safety officer may be called upon to perform a job task analysis to assure the assigned duties are within the prescribed restrictions identified by the treating physician or independent medical examination. Job tasks may change as restrictions are modified. The safety officer will work with the supervisor and human resources representative to identify the physical demands of the essential job functions. Some tasks may have to be redesigned for the return to work to prevent further injury.

A representative from Human Resources may be called upon to assist in placement opportunities, address benefits and other related human resource issues. Human Resources will provide resources for seriously injured employees. Human Resources will address all interrelationships of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Family Medical Leave Act and workers compensation return to work programs.

There may be unique circumstances for not bringing the employee back to work which would require the approval of the Chief Business Officer.