

# **Administrative Regulation (Model)**

## **Return-to-Work/Temporary Work Assignment Program**

### **Preface**

Clearly, the most significant costs related to workers' compensation claims are associated with lost time injuries. A return-to-work program operates on the premise that worker's compensation costs will be reduced if an employee returns to the workplace as soon as possible.

Physicians in the field of rehabilitation agree the difference between the success or failure of a return-to-work program is more frequently a factor of mental attitude than physical symptoms. Mental attitude and rehabilitation depend, to a large extent, on the employee's attitude toward the job, their feelings towards the supervisor and the employer. If these conditions are acceptable, work is an excellent form of mental therapy. Work enables an employee to move from a disability environment to a work environment. At home, the employee's mind is occupied with the disability and their physical pains may become magnified. The employee may develop feelings of low self esteem and may feel forgotten by the employer.

A return-to-work program enhances both the psychological and physical healing. It also shortens the period of time an employee is off the job and enables an employee to resume the normal job duties without the likelihood of litigation.

The objectives of a return-to-work program include:

1. Returning employees to work as soon as possible without danger of re-injury.
2. Avoiding deterioration of work skills due to a prolonged absence from work.
3. Reducing the number of lost time incidents and the total number of lost work days.
4. Reducing disability costs and the amount of medical treatment.
5. Reducing the number of litigated claims.
6. Maintaining productivity without hiring temporary employees.
7. Maintaining a high level of communication with the employee to help reinforce management commitment.

There is significant latitude in the assignment of return-to-work tasks as long as the physician's restrictions are followed. The job placement and assignments may include:

- a. The employee's same work unit and their same job but within the restrictions.
- b. The employee's same work unit but different job tasks.
- c. A different work unit and different job tasks.

The return-to-work program shall be coordinated by the personnel department, the injured employee's supervisor, and SISC.

## Operating Procedure

1. Upon hire and after an injury or illness, employees will be notified in writing of the district's return-to-work program.
2. When an injury occurs the claim process is started as usual and a copy of the supervisor's report of injury/illness is completed and processed immediately.
3. The employee is sent for medical treatment to an approved provider. The physician shall be notified that the district has a return-to-work program in place. The physician shall also be given a copy of the employee's job description at the time of the visit, or as soon as possible, to enable the physician to make a proper evaluation regarding the return-to-work restrictions. If necessary, SISC will be contacted to provide assistance in defining job functions.

After receiving medical treatment the employee reports back to the worksite with the physician's report, ability to work statement, and any other documentation. The district's authorized agent should contact the physician's office to clarify any uncertainties.

The employee will be returned to work within the restrictions given by the physician with the first priority being to assign the employee to the same work unit and same job observing the prescribed restrictions. If appropriate tasks cannot be found within the same work unit, the employee may be placed in another work unit within the district.

If the physician determines the employee is not able to perform return-to-work tasks, the employee will be placed on industrial leave until such time as appropriate work can be assigned or the restrictions are lifted. If the physician states the employee should not return to work for a specified time, the district and/or SISC shall follow up with the physician to confirm the recommendation. The district will also remain in contact with the physician to follow up on the possibility of return-to-work at a later date.

If the employee refuses the work in the return-to-work program, no temporary disability benefits or industrial accident leave benefits are payable. Sick leave or other leaves will be subject to approval by the personnel department. All cases will be evaluated on an individual basis.

4. The employee's status shall be evaluated a minimum of once a month. If the restrictions are to be of short duration, the supervisor should evaluate the employee's status on a weekly basis. The job assignment may change as the restrictions are lessened. SISC shall maintain communication with the physician to ensure a return to full job status as soon as possible.
5. Because the assignment under the return-to-work program is temporary, the employee shall be compensated on their regular pay schedule regardless of the classification of temporary assignment. It is not the intent of the district to create new permanent assignments.
6. The district may choose to return an employee to work on a part time basis if appropriate. The schedule shall not be less than two (2) hours per day.

If it does not appear the injured employee will return to full duty at the end of ninety (90) days, SISC shall conduct an evaluation to determine the employee's return-to-work status.

## **Types of Return-to-Work Tasks**

If the work restrictions are minor, the regular job duties may be modified to accommodate the employee. However, as the restrictions become more specific, the task assignment will also become more specific and defined. Each case shall be evaluated on an individual basis.

The purpose of a return-to-work program is not to establish new jobs or to displace other employees. Its purpose is to allow the district to implement a flexible program that will benefit both the district and the injured employee.

Examples of return-to-work tasks include, but are not limited to:

inventory	sprinkler repair	research
documenting	job evaluations	dispatching
transferring files	safety inspections	bus monitor
filing	equipment repair	telephone duty
cleaning tools	painting	yard duty
marking inventory	key inventory	classroom aide
tutoring		

SISC may be contacted to provide assistance with placement options. A job analysis may also be obtained from SISC to help provide the physician with information to determine if the employee has the capabilities to return to the regular job or proposed assignment.