

RTW: MONITORING RETURN-TO-WORK PLANS

Supervisors are key players in the RTW process and are instrumental in ensuring the success of individual RTW Plans.

- They are the usual person that directs and monitors the work
- They are familiar with the type of work performed in their work unit and will be able to identify those tasks in it that match the injured worker's medical restrictions
- They are known to the injured worker – i.e. already have developed a relationship with the worker (unless the RTW duties fall outside the injured worker's area/unit)
- They are the usual person to whom the worker would report – i.e. often the first link in an organization's "communication chain"
- They are often the first person aware of any problems with a RTW plan
- They are the usual person to whom the worker would bring his/her questions
- They play an important role in setting the tone/climate of their area

Supervisors need to:

- have a good grasp of the RTW Program (why it has been introduced, its benefits etc.)
- know the RTW processes/procedures
- know their specific RTW responsibilities
- fulfill their RTW responsibilities in a timely manner, as they would any other responsibility assigned to them in the organization

A supervisor's role in individual RTW plans is to identify suitable work, monitor that work, report problems, work together with the injured worker and RTW planning participants in overcoming obstacles, and follow up with the injured worker to ensure he/she is, indeed, able to fulfill his/her pre-injury job.

Ensuring Safety

Supervisors must be involved in the identification of the alternate or modified work. Protecting the health and well being of his/her workers is always a key responsibility of any supervisor. They need to ensure the safety and welfare of all people and property possibly affected by the RTW plan when developing, implementing and monitoring an injured worker's RTW plan.

Monitoring RTW plans

Supervisor's responsibilities include monitoring the injured worker's progress. Monitoring a plan involves:

- Identifying concerns and problems with the RTW plan
- Discussing concerns and issues around job performance, safety, etc.
- Showing interest in both the alternate or modified work being done by the injured worker as well as the condition of the injured worker
- Communicating any concerns about the RTW plan to the appropriate person/s
- Making needed changes to the RTW plan
- Ensuring coworkers support the RTW plan
- Supporting and promoting the RTW Program and individual RTW plans
- Following up after the injured worker has recovered to ensure that there are no ongoing problems

Sample RTW Monitoring Procedures

The supervisor will:

- Ensure that any necessary changes to the work unit required by the RTW plan have been put in place before the worker returns to work
- Advise coworkers of the return of the injured worker and discuss how the RTW plan may impact them
- Meet daily with the injured worker
- Never sanction more or new work duties for the worker without medical authorization
- Welcome the worker to the unit/department
- Go over the RTW plan with the worker and discuss any adjustments made to the work environment, equipment, work organization etc. required by the plan (if applicable)
- Discuss the specific alternate or modified work identified on the RTW plan
- Discuss the specific activities the worker has been instructed not to engage in
- Instruct the worker to bring any problems, issues, concerns etc. with the RTW plan to his/her attention immediately
- Resolve, if possible, any identified problems or issues at the unit/department level (could require minor adjustments/changes to the RTW plan)
- Immediately inform the RTW coordinator of any problems unable to be resolved at the unit/department level
- Document any problems and/or adjustments made to the RTW plan

Some workplaces have a standardized form and/or checklist to assist supervisors in monitoring RTW plans.

If there is a change in the RTW plan, processes must ensure that the injured worker and the supervisor sign off, especially if new duties are assigned. Revised copies of the new plan would need to be forwarded to the WCB.

If the plan is amended due to a change in the worker's medical restrictions, the updated medical restrictions form (HCP form) also needs to be forwarded to the WCB.

Confidentiality

Medical restrictions, medical diagnosis and medical treatments are considered to be confidential information. A supervisor may be privy to this information through his/her role in the development of a RTW plan or even directly from an injured worker. Regardless of how a supervisor has learned the information he/she must not share this information with others unless he/she has received written permission from the injured worker to do so.

Any documentation that includes confidential information must be stored in a secure manner.

If confidentiality is not maintained, not only could there be a significant impact on how the injured worker and his/her coworkers or supervisor interact, but the employer could be legally liable.