

Return-to-Work Orientation

Formal orientation sessions can help an organization build a successful Return-to-Work (RTW) program. Formal orientation is important for its educational benefits. It also opens the channels of communication between different groups in an organization and is an opportunity to correct any misconceptions about RTW early in program development or implementation. The focus of the orientation should concentrate on the benefits of RTW.

Developing a RTW Program

Education begins before starting work on program development. It is important to introduce the basic concepts and principles of RTW to the staff members charged with developing the RTW program.

RTW orientation should include discussion on the following topics:

- Definition of a RTW program and RTW plan
- General criteria of suitable RTW plan work options
- Benefits of RTW
- WCB legislation
- How a RTW Program can assist in fulfilling other legislative requirements
- Conditions for success

Worker orientation

Orient existing staff to the RTW program at its roll-out or implementation stage and include it as part of orientations for new staff. When orienting staff, convey:

- RTW plan criteria
- Benefits of RTW
- WCB legislation – Worker obligations (WCB Act, 2013, sections 51 and 101)
- WCB legislation – Employer obligations (WCB Act, 2013 section 53)
- How to complete the medical restrictions form
- Information specific to an individual employer:
 - Company's RTW policy
 - Company's Respectful Workplace policy
 - RTW plan form (i.e., what it looks like, what it records, who gets it, etc.)
 - RTW procedures (i.e., where to get forms, who to contact, how and when a RTW planning meeting is arranged, etc.)

It is important to introduce and discuss the RTW program at a worker level to reduce resistance and promote program improvements. Through communication, workers can discuss their concerns and, where appropriate and over time, you can make changes and improvements the RTW program.

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Supervisors

Immediate supervisors play an important part in the RTW process, including their role as front-line management to whom workers usually will bring their questions and concerns. Supervisors should receive a thorough grounding into all aspects of the RTW program.

Present supervisors the same information as workers, but include additional education in their RTW responsibilities to:

- maintain confidentiality
- identify and document alternate or modified work
- monitor RTW plans
- maintain positive work environments

Union

For open and transparent communication, a union representative may attend the supervisor orientation. By doing so, the union witnesses firsthand the messages and direction given to supervisors and managers about RTW. Consequently, the union is in a better position to confirm implementation of the RTW program in an appropriate manner consistent with its understanding of how the program works.

Senior Management

Senior management should attend or introduce the RTW orientation sessions. The presence of senior managers shows the priority given to safe and effective return to work.

Other communication channels

There should be additional communication channels in place to reinforce the information presented in the formal presentations.

Some communication channels for employers to consider include:

- RTW information in an employees' handbook
- RTW information in a supervisors handbook
- RTW information in orientation package and presentations to new workers
- RTW information in orientation package and presentation to new managers or supervisors
- Posting RTW policy and procedures in staff rooms
- Posting of specific policy and procedures and forms on intranet systems
- Posting of employer-specific RTW program manual on intranet
- Providing hard copies of the employer-specific RTW program manual in HR, union offices, etc.
- Pre-stuffed information packages that include all of the forms and instructions that injured workers need to complete at the initial time of injury

