

WCB Support

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) recognizes the role that return to work (RTW) plays in promoting the recovery of injured workers and in reducing the risk of chronic disability developing.

RTW is not a return to work at any price. The WCB expects that the alternate or modified work offered by an employer to an injured worker:

- Be productive (contribute to the objectives or operations of the company)
- Be within the medical capabilities of the injured worker
- Be within the skills and abilities of the injured worker
- Not endanger the health or safety of the injured worker or his/her coworkers

WCB Treatment Philosophy

The WCB does not coerce health care providers (HCPs) in sending injured workers back to work when it is not safe to do so (i.e. when RTW is beyond their medical capabilities). However, RTW facilitation does involve encouraging both HCPs and injured workers to consider and recognize the benefits of RTW at the earliest possible opportunity.

HCPs will be challenged to provide interventions that are outcome-focused and goal-directed. HCPs should consider how clinical interventions will achieve the end objective of safe return to work.

WCB Legislation

The WCB does not force any injured worker back to work. The WCB has, however, the legal responsibility and authority to determine fitness for employment, loss of earning capacity and the extent or duration of wage-loss compensation entitlement.

In other words, if a worker is fit for suitable (i.e., safe, productive, etc.) alternate or modified work, and the employer has suitable (i.e., safe, productive, etc.) alternate or modified work, then time loss earning compensation benefits are not payable.

WCB Support

Return to work is a priority at the both the claims entitlement level (claims under four weeks), as well as the case management level (claims of four weeks or more).

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In many cases, an employer with established RTW processes can return its injured workers to suitable alternate or modified work in a timely manner successfully. However, a variety of RTW scenarios may arise where WCB support is required. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Situations where an injured worker is not prepared to accept suitable RTW duties;
- An injured worker's HCP has not provided medical restrictions and/or provided a blanket "time off work" note;
- Where more medical information is necessary in order to determine the suitability of proposed RTW job options;
- Situations where an employer indicates their RTW job options are limited, given the current availability of suitable work and the medical limitations.

In any of these circumstances, a WCB claims entitlement specialist (CES) or case manager (CM) investigates in order to establish the suitability of RTW given the medical condition of the injured worker.

What follows depends on the outcome of the investigation. For instance, the investigation could result in a RTW plan going forward, making modifications to a proposed RTW plan, a RTW plan not going forward or, in some circumstances, may result in a suspension and/or termination of wage replacement benefits.

Process

After having initiated its own internal RTW processes, an employer should also notify the WCB of its willingness to provide alternate or modified work at the beginning of any claim.

Where an employer has concerns or questions regarding the medical information (or lack of) obtained from an HCP, they should contact the WCB immediately and speak with the assigned CES or CM to discuss.

Managing RTW

Having RTW processes at a workplace does not always mean that every injured worker returns to the workplace immediately. Not every claim will follow a smooth path. What employers can do, however, is manage these situations actively and follow standard processes when faced with complicated situations.

In particular, this means prompt and frequent contact with the WCB whenever the employer encounters problems with their own RTW efforts or they require more information about an injured worker's ability to perform RTW job duties. This can include requesting a meeting with a WCB CES or CM in order to discuss the issue/s.

As with all other elements of effective RTW processes communication is the key to success.

