

How Do TRTW Programs Work?

Exactly how TRTW programs are implemented varies widely, but most include the following:

- ◆ The employee's recovery is monitored by a healthcare provider who
 - identifies when the employee is medically ready to return to some form of work,
 - defines functional limitations for the employee, and
 - reevaluates the employee periodically to monitor medical progress and alter or remove work restrictions as appropriate.
- ◆ The employer notifies the treating healthcare provider of the TRTW program and the willingness to accommodate work restrictions.
- ◆ The employer identifies workplace activities that meet the provider's restrictions. Whether in the employee's previous scope of work or in other areas, the goal is for the employee to perform work that has value to the employer, keep a work schedule similar to the employee's normal one, and maintain relationships with co-workers.
- ◆ The employer stays in contact with the absent employee (e.g. with a weekly call) so the employee feels valued and connected to employment. In small municipalities, the contact person may be a selectboard member.
- ◆ The employer states the terms of the TRTW plan for the employee's transition back to a full work schedule, emphasizing the good faith effort to be contributed by all parties.
- ◆ After a period of modified or light duty work, the employee is medically reevaluated to see how he or she can progress to more physically demanding work or full duty.

Loss Control and Workers' Compensation

Fred Satink fsatink@vlct.org
Deputy Director, Underwriting & Loss Control ext. 1948

Peggy Tucker ptucker@vlct.org
Manager, Workers' Compensation Claims ext. 1937

Peggy Gates pgates@vlct.org
Manager, Workers' Compensation Claims ext. 1922

Susan Ward sward@vlct.org
Senior Claims Representative ext. 1911

Tonya Emmons..... temmons@vlct.org
Claims Representative ext. 1971

Stephanie Fleury..... sfleury@vlct.org
Claims Representative ext. 1916

If you have any questions about Transitional Return to Work programs or whether a particular workers' compensation claimant might be a good candidate for one, please call 1-800-649-7915.

PACIF Property and Casualty Intermunicipal Fund

Vermont League of Cities & Towns
89 Main Street, Suite 4, Montpelier, VT 05602
(800) 649-7915 or (802) 229-9111
Fax (802) 229-2211
www.vlct.org

Transitional Return To Work (TRTW)

for members of VLCT PACIF

*Proactive, Responsive, Local
Risk Management Solutions
tailored to
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What Is a TRTW Program?

A Transitional Return to Work (TRTW) program is a focused effort by an employer to provide injured employees with suitable temporary duty assignments to help minimize the time they can't work while recovering from on-the-job injuries. By performing tasks tailored to fit functional restrictions identified by the treating healthcare provider, employees are often able to return to the workplace more quickly than if they have to wait until they recover enough to go back to full duty.

The best TRTW programs use a simple policy that establishes clear parameters, objectives, and processes. They are most effective when the employer designates a medical provider who specializes in workplace injuries.

Why Use Transitional Return to Work?

The numbers are alarming. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that workers absent because of work-related injuries ...

- ◆ for more than six months have only about a 50% probability of returning to work,
- ◆ for more than one year have a only a 25% probability of returning to work, and
- ◆ for more than two years have virtually no chance of returning to work.

A TRTW program will benefit eligible employees who have a sincere desire to recover and get back to their job. It will also serve their co-workers by continuing a productive work schedule and reducing the department's costs.

Impressive Benefits

An effective TRTW program can:

- ◆ Help employers return their valuable, experienced workforce back to full duty more quickly.
- ◆ Reduce claim costs, which translates into savings on workers' compensation premiums.
- ◆ Save employers money that might otherwise be spent on other employees' overtime or hiring, training, and paying replacement workers.
- ◆ Help injured employees maintain their social work relationships and work routines.
- ◆ Minimize physical deconditioning that occurs when injured workers have no activity.
- ◆ Reduce overall recovery time for injured workers.
- ◆ Smooth injured employees' transitions back to regular duty.
- ◆ Increase awareness of safe, suitable jobs for all employees.
- ◆ Help the employer accomplish tasks that they might not otherwise have staffing or time for, by designating some of these for use by the TRTW program.
- ◆ Serve the greater good by keeping employees active and in the workforce.

How to Proceed

To discuss TRTW programs and/or Designated Medical Providers, PACIF members should call Fred Satink at 800-649-7915, ext. 1948.

When your TRTW program is in place, plan to work closely with your chosen medical provider and the claim representative assigned to each particular claim.

Questions and Answers

Why not just let the employee recover at home?
The medical community recognizes that in many cases inactivity inhibits physical recovery. Also, isolation can enhance the risk of depression.

How will other workers treat employees who are performing transitional work?

The support of fellow employees is crucial. Employers should teach all employees the value of this mission so they understand that if they were injured at work, they would have the same opportunity to work on a modified duty basis.

Will transitional return to work deprive employees of workers' comp benefits?

No. A TRTW program does not affect employees' rights relative to benefits, unless an employee refuses an offer of modified duty.

Are we required to use a Designated Medical Provider (DMP) in our TRTW program?

No, but it helps to use a medical provider who will partner with you yet remain unbiased in his or her treatment of the injured employee.

Definitions

Modified Work: The employee returns to the original job, and accommodations are made to address any limitations. These may include reducing the amount of work time or restricting certain activities (such as bending or lifting).

Light Duty: If the original job cannot be modified to conform to an employee's abilities, a more suitable job or jobs are assigned until the employee is able to return to the original job.