



We Observe Recognize Know Safety

Recognize that safety programs and procedures are needed and required.

SUPERVISOR GUIDE

Subject: Early Return-to-Work (ERTW)

Why Have an Early Return-to-Work Program?

Establishing an Early Return-to-Work program is one part of a complete safety program. Experience shows that injured workers recover faster when they return to work. The longer an injured worker remains away from work, the more difficult it is to return to gainful employment. Returning to regular work usually occurs more quickly when transitional or modified duty is offered to the injured employee. Companies that have implemented Early Return-to-Work programs have seen savings of up to 20 to 40% or more in workers' compensation costs.

Through safety measures and the development of an Early Return-to-Work program, employers may lower their experience rating, thereby reducing premium costs. When injured workers return to work, they are less likely to retain unnecessary legal counsel, thereby lowering claims costs. Everyone wins when people return to work.

Keys To Early Return-To-Work Success

1. Management Commitment

Commitment and support from an organization's top management are keys to establishing an effective Early Return-to-Work program. Support for Early Return-to-Work and a fully integrated Risk Management program should be consistent and clearly communicated throughout the organization. The program will be more successful when managers, supervisors and workers clearly understand the program and work together.

2. Preparation

Careful planning and decision making can lay the groundwork for the success of any program. Identify and involve key players early and provide them with training. Goals and policies should be established, along with appropriate forms and letters.

3. Training

Early Return-to-Work is more successful when all parties realize its value. Management, supervisors and employees will benefit from training that shows how this program works.

4. Communication

Policies and procedures relating to Early Return-to-Work should be carefully developed and made public throughout the organization. Maintain communication with injured workers, supervisors and medical care providers throughout the recovery process.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING EARLY RETURN-TO-WORK

1. Develop Clear Goals and Policies

Establishing an Early Return-to-Work program requires careful planning and decision making. Management must decide what outcomes are to be expected and what steps will be taken. Factors considered include existing company policies, collective bargaining agreements (if any) and the corporate culture of the organization.

First, identify employees who may be medically eligible to take part in the program. Alternative positions or accommodations can then be considered for those whose injuries will result in temporary or permanent impairment. Indicate that modified duty assignments will be consistent with medical guidelines. Clarify time limits on transitional assignments. Specify that when such work is available, participation is mandatory.

Once goals and policies are agreed upon, written policy and procedures can be developed. KESA supplies a sample policy statement for your convenience.

2. Designate a Program Coordinator

It is recommended that one individual, such as a safety manager or human resources representative, take the lead role in implementing the Early Return-to-Work program. This helps ensure consistent administration and accountability. Define the coordinator's responsibilities, which may include:

- Communicate program information to supervisors and workers.
- Monitor the recovery status of injured workers.
- Manage correspondence from injured workers, medical providers and KESA.
- Work with supervisors to ensure that consistent and appropriate communication with injured workers is ongoing and documented.

3. Identify Transitional Duty

In preparation for accommodating injured workers who cannot perform their usual jobs, transitional assignments should be identified. An important first step is performing job analyses on the various positions in your organization. The actual demands and essential elements of each position must be identified. This can be used for developing individual modified assignments. The key is to find ways to make use of the worker's skills and knowledge, rather than "make-work" assignments.

Creativity in developing modified assignments enables the employee to be productive while meeting medical guidelines. Consider the following:

- ♦ Part-time employment
- ♦ Alternative tasks
- ♦ Jobs in other departments
- ♦ Transitioning through different jobs
- ♦ Temporary jobs
- ♦ Job sharing
- ♦ Job modification

Look at each situation individually. It is common for a returning worker to be able to handle all but one or two aspects of the job. In such cases, it often makes sense to explore job restructuring. This involves arranging for a co-worker to take on those aspects of the job that the recovering worker cannot perform. In return, the recovering worker takes on some of the tasks typically done by the co-worker. This may include jobs combining tasks from several workers. A sample job analysis form is provided at www.kesa.org.

4. Develop Standard Forms

Sample forms can be downloaded and modified to suit your organization at www.kesa.org. Using these standard forms and letters ensures consistency and helps supervisors gather and communicate essential information.

Forms needed:

- **Early Return-to-Work Policy Statement**
- **Notice to KESA of a Potential Case for Early Return-to-Work**
- **Doctor Notification Letter** informing the treating doctor of the organization's Early Return-to-Work policy.
- **Job Analysis Form** detailing the physical capacities needed for the position.
- **Return-to-Work Physical Capacities Form** to be completed by the doctor, detailing the worker's physical capabilities.
- **Return-to-Work Availability Letter** informing the injured worker of the position assignment.
- **Temporary Modified Duty Assignment Form** detailing the modified duties as assigned by supervisor and accepted by employee.

5. Provide Training

It is essential that supervisory staff become fully trained in the principles and procedures of Early Return-to-Work.

Training topics should include:

- **Accident reporting and investigation**
- **Need for early and ongoing communication**
- **Methods of documentation**
- **Job modifications and alternative assignments**

6. Maintain Communications

Supervisors should regularly reach out to injured workers during recovery. This illustrates the organization's concern for the injured worker and interest in having the worker back on the job. It enhances morale by valuing both the contributions of injured workers and affected co-workers. Maintain contact with medical teams as well, informing them of your organization's policy and practice regarding ERTW.

How To Use The ERTW Forms

Early Return To Work Policy Statement - This serves notice and explains your ERTW policy to employees. We recommend presenting this to new employees upon orientation and redistributing this on a regular basis to all employees. Employees should know what to expect if they are injured on the job, and that their healthy recovery is a top priority that involves them, their doctors, and their supervisors.

Notice to KESA of an ERTW Case - This alerts KESA that you have identified an injured employee as a possible participant in your ERTW program.

Doctor Notification Letter - This advises the doctor of your company's ERTW program, directs the physician's attention to information about the employee's job demands, and asks the doctor to fill in, sign and return information concerning the employee's physical capabilities. This should be provided to the injured worker to give to the physician or sent to the physician directly by you. **Copy KESA after the doctor completes the form.**

Job Demands Analysis - This is filled in by the employer and accompanies the Doctor Notification Letter. It summarizes the employee's current job duties and physical requirements. You can use this form to identify transitional duty throughout your company and present the doctor with a transitional position for your employee. **Send copy to KESA.**

Physical Capabilities Worksheet - This form accompanies the Doctor Notification Letter to be completed by the doctor upon examination of the injured worker. It should be provided to your employee to start the ERTW process once an injury is reported. You should also send it to the treating physician on a regular basis, so that work restrictions can be addressed at each examination. **Copy KESA after the doctor completes the form.**

Return-To-Work Availability Letter - This should be sent to the injured worker by certified mail as a documented offer of a transitional duty position; a copy should be kept on file by the employer, and a **copy sent to KESA.** This letter is an important document if transitional duty is refused.

