

# **RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM GUIDE**

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FOR EMPLOYEES DISABLED DUE TO WORK RELATED INJURY OR ILLNESS**

**A. PHILOSOPHY**

At some point during the recovery phase, a physician may determine that the employee can do some, but not all, of the work duties. The physician will provide a description of the physical restriction(s) under which the employee can be returned to work to the employee and the adjuster. This information is given to the employee's supervisor or department head, hereafter referred to as "Home" department. The Home department is responsible for reviewing the restriction(s) provided and determining whether the employee's regular job can be modified to accommodate the identified physical restriction(s) on a temporary basis. In most circumstances, modifications can be easily accomplished by temporarily removing physically challenging tasks, reassigning those tasks to other employees, or providing assistance for the injured employee. Modified work can also take the form of alternate duties within the department or part time work, if medically indicated.

If the Home department cannot accommodate an employee's physical restriction(s), the campus office of Risk Safety/Health and Safety, Human Resources (HR), and volunteer Host departments will coordinate an attempt to provide a modified duty position under this Return to Work (RTW) Program. The University will exercise discretion to accommodate work restrictions, whenever feasible, for employees who become disabled due to a work related injury or illness. However, as a management tool, this Program in no way requires the University to create a position for the sole purpose of accommodating an injured employee or to extend employment to an injured employee when no meaningful work is available. Modified duty work may not be implemented for every disabled employee.

### **C. ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA**

Determinations on inclusion of employees in the Program will be made by concurrence of SORS, the Home department, and HR based on employee medical records, physician recommendations, and communications with department supervisors and human resource staff. Following are minimum requirements for consideration of an employee in the RTW Program:

Employee attributes:

- Has a work related injury or illness that is deemed compensable, by the System Office of Risk Services, under the Alaska Workers' Compensation Act
- Has been declared by a licensed primary treating physician unable to perform regular job duties
- Is predicted, by a licensed primary treating physician, to return to full duty work within 60 days
- Has an employment contract with the University that would otherwise be continuing once the RTW Program period is completed
- Possess physical, mental, emotional capacities and other skills necessary to perform work in the identified RTW position(s)

## **D. DURATION OF RETURN TO WORK ASSIGNMENT**

A period of “work hardening” of 30 to 60 days prior to full release to work has been found to greatly increase the success of re-entry into the work place after a serious injury. Employees accepted into this Program have a predicted full recovery time frame of no more than 30 to 60 days. Every effort is made not to place an employee into the RTW Program unless there is solid medical indication that the 30 to 60 days are all that is required before full recovery is reached. However, on occasion, an employee does not progress as expected and the physician will recommend an extension of time in modified work status. Extensions of time, up to 30 days maximum, may be granted if an evaluation by SORS of the circumstances resulting in the requested extension reveal that the employee is highly likely to be released to full duty within another 30 days, or less.

Acceptability for the Program terminates once an employee is released to his or her regular job duties, or at 60 days, unless an extension is granted by SORS. The Program may also be terminated for superseding employment actions that may be unrelated to this Program or lack of adherence to the RTW Program guidelines.

## **E. PROGRAM FUNDING AND TIMESHEETS**

The Home department continues to pay the regular salary (no overtime is allowed) for RTW assignments, unless the Home department hires a temporary employee to replace the injured employee. If a replacement is hired within the Home Department to cover the absent employee’s duties, and only as approved, the RTW Program salary is charged directly to the System Office of Risk Services, via Home department time sheet.

Timesheets for employees accepted into the RTW Program must be copied to SORS. The process for timesheet processing is as follows:

RTW in Home Department:

- Process as usual
- Copy timesheet to SORS

RTW in Host Department:

- Employee picks up timesheet from the Home department before or shortly after beginning work in the Host department
- Host department Supervisor approves and signs the timesheet at the end of the pay period
- After the Host Supervisor has signed, the employee brings the timesheet back to the Home department for the Home supervisor’s signature and processing by the department PPA, as per normal procedures
- Copy timesheet to SORS

## F. PARTICIPANT ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Participants typically involved in the RTW Program are identified below, along with their respective responsibilities:

### Injured Employee

Must fully understand that this is temporary work, as a part of their rehabilitation program, and that they will be expected to return to their full job as soon as medically able

Participate in the RTW program to best of your ability

Understand that refusal of an offer of modified duty will jeopardize your workers' compensation and other benefits

Maintain communication with Supervisors and Adjuster throughout the duration of the disability

Adhere to all medical recommendations, on and off the job

Comply with RTW Program assignment and notify Supervisor of any difficulties

Immediately report any difficulties with RTW Program not promptly resolved with the Supervisors to Adjuster

### System Office of Risk Services (SORS)

Provide overall management of RTW Program

Manage workers / rs e rs / m e r

Identify tasks within the department that the injured worker can perform within the restriction(s). Examples of tasks normally acceptable for restricted work activities include answering phones, filing, supply inventory, library organization, laundry, etc. Coordinate the return to work with the Adjuster to ensure physician approval has been received and the workers' compensation wage benefits are terminated  
Maintain contact with employee throughout disability period and RTW Program  
Assist Host department supervisor, as needed  
Promptly notify SORS of any problems or complications

Host Department (Host)



Office of Risk Services, Human Resources, the Home department, and, if applicable, the Host department.

## **7. Supervision of RTW Assignment in a Host Department**

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