

An employer's guide to transitional duty

This guide contains the basic information needed to establish an effective transitional duty program. It is intended for use by employers insured with Travelers.

Steps to implement this program:

1. Read through this guide
2. Make copies of the "The procedure for all employees" section of this guide and distribute to your employees
3. Review the contents of this guide with supervisors, emphasizing the importance of supporting return-to-work through transitional duty

If you have an employee who is injured and cannot perform his/her regular job:

1. Read through this guide once again
2. Follow the specific steps below to develop a transitional duty position

What is transitional duty?

Transitional duty is a process for returning injured employees to work as quickly and as effectively as possible. It provides a bridge back to full duty by offering work that is within the restrictions established by the doctor. Sometimes referred to as "light" or "modified" duty, transitional duty helps employers establish control over the recovery process.

During transitional duty:

- The injured employee performs tasks that are within the specific restrictions provided by the doctor
- These tasks are often quite different from the employee's regular job
- Transitional duty jobs are normally developed just before the injured employee is ready to return to work and may include a wide variety of tasks - whatever needs doing at the time - as long as the activities do not exceed the doctor's restrictions

The time following an injury is usually traumatic for the injured individual, co-workers (who may have witnessed the incident) and the employer. Transitional duty offers everyone involved a highly visible and positive healing process. It is the right thing to do. At the same time, transitional duty offers employers an important tool for reducing the costs of workers' compensation.

Why is transitional duty important?

Transitional duty is an essential tool for controlling workers' compensation losses and for speeding the recovery of injured workers. Transitional duty is beneficial to injured employees in a number of ways:

It keeps the injured employee as active as possible at the job site, which encourages a more rapid return to full time duty

- It keeps the recovering worker productive and close to the work team
- It reduces risk of the "disability syndrome," where lack of activity leads to depression and a worsening condition

- Transitional duty is also beneficial to employers because:
- It sets a clear message for all workers that they are valued and that "vacations on comp" will not be tolerated
- It enhances productivity by making sure that, even in a reduced capacity, people contribute to the work effort
- It lowers workers' compensation indemnity (lost wage) and medical costs by reducing time away from work and speeding recovery

How do you use transitional duty?

There are a few key steps in developing an effective transitional duty program:

1. The medical provider specifies the physical restrictions resulting from the work-related injury or illness
2. The employer develops a temporary job that matches these restrictions: you should consult with the doctor and your Travelers Claim Representative, as necessary
3. Keep the transitional duty job as close to the employee's regular job as possible. If possible, have the treating physician review the temporary position description
4. Explain the temporary job to the employee and address any concerns or issues. Provide any necessary training. Take steps to ensure the transitional duty is performed safely!
5. Make sure that your Travelers Claims Representative knows when the employee returns to work through transitional duty
6. Make sure the employee continues therapy/doctor visits at reasonable intervals
7. As restrictions are lifted by the doctor, increase the job demands and move the employee closer to his/her regular job

The key to establishing appropriate transitional duty is to review the less demanding tasks that need to be done during the recovery period. You might group the less demanding tasks from several jobs or you may have special one-time tasks that can be done without significant physical effort. Examples include, inventory, training new employees, and filing. Every injury and every recovery process is unique. While it may be useful to develop a transitional duty "job bank" before you actually need it, this step is not required. The key to successful transitional duty is to match the specific restrictions of the individual with the work available at the time of the injury.

Implementing your transitional duty program

It is extremely important to establish your transitional duty program before it is actually needed. Your employees should perceive the program as a benefit, not as a crisis response to a specific injury. To do this, you need to communicate the specifics of the program to all employees; communication materials are included in this packet.

Your transitional duty program should be implemented through the following steps:

1. Develop your transitional duty policy (see below)
2. Communicate this policy to your employees. The procedure for all employees section will help you communicate the policy. It is especially important that supervisors understand the importance of this program. Take a few minutes to go over the brochure with them
3. Schedule meetings with your supervisors to review the program. They, in turn, should discuss the policy with their staffs
4. If one of your employees suffers a work related injury and is disabled from his/her regular responsibilities, bring the person back to work as soon as possible through transitional duty

Developing a written policy

You should incorporate the following policy on Transitional Duty into your written policies and procedures, making any changes you deem necessary:

Transitional duty

Our company has developed a return-to-work program as a benefit for all employees. If an employee is disabled and unable to perform the regular job, we will make every effort to speed recovery through the use of transitional duty. Working with the treating physician, we will develop a temporary position that matches the physical restrictions established by the doctor. In most cases this transitional duty will last no longer than 30 days, renewable for additional 30 days.

The procedure for all employees

If you are injured on the job:

1. Report to your supervisor immediately. If necessary, you will be sent to our medical provider for treatment
2. The doctor will determine your work status. If there are physical restrictions that prevent you from performing your regular job, we will find transitional duty work for you
3. Your physical restrictions will be reviewed on a regular basis by the doctor, so that we can modify the transitional duty job and return you to your regular job as quickly as possible

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