

Modified Duty: A Guide to Supervisor Responsibilities

The behaviors and actions displayed by supervisory and management personnel in response to a workplace injury can have a significant impact on both the cost and duration of a claim. Studies have shown that regular contact by supervisory and management personnel achieves better results. When these staff members respond promptly, communicate effectively, and show empathy towards the injured employee, the individual can be much more receptive to the idea of returning to work and of modified job duties.

Pre-incident

- Discuss company's stance on modified duty during the interview and new employee orientation process
- Promote early reporting and follow-up with any employee injury complaints
- Recommend medical attention and treatment if needed
- Develop a list of pre-determined jobs able to accommodate a wide variety of medical restrictions
- Consider soliciting job task ideas from coworkers to match various medical restrictions or give this task to a functioning safety committee as a project
- Take time to answer employee questions related to the company's modified duty program
- Emphasize the high degree of importance that safety has within the company operations
- Contact and visit the principal medical providers that treat your employees' work-related injuries
- Establish your commitment to the program by inviting the medical providers to tour your company to view the layout, the tasks that are required and the modified duty jobs that are currently available or could be used
- Provide the medical community with an overview of your program and a listing of predetermined jobs and request the information be kept available for reference and that all appropriate medical staff be aware of the information
- If you have or can develop a relationship with a medical provider, encourage injured employees to seek medical treatment from that provider
- Explain to employees that the provider understands the company's policies, what is available in modified duty and that the provider will work with all parties concerned to get the employee back to full earning capacity as soon as possible

Injury Response

- Take time to handle the injury properly
- Authorize medical attention immediately, if needed
- Provide necessary authorization forms and arrange for transportation, if needed
- Express concern, be supportive and have a positive attitude, even though there is an injury to process and review
- Avoid blaming the employee and provide them with encouraging support by emphasizing their importance to the company
- Investigate the circumstances of the reported injury and record all pertinent data
- Try to identify root cause of incident
- Report the injury and supply documentation to the human resource department or other designated area
- Determine preventive measures or actions and make corrections immediately
- Communicate major changes and requests to upper management

Injury Management

- Keep informed about the employee's recovery, current treatment and how the employee perceives the quality of the medical treatment by contacting the individual every three days until they return to work

- Maintain regular contact with your claims representative
- Explain all modified jobs in detail to the employee and point out any safety precautions that may exist
- Know the employee's medical restrictions and monitor them daily
- Consider keeping a daily log to ensure that you and the employee do not exceed the restrictions unintentionally
- Be aware of any employee on modified duty whether he/she is working in your department or not
- Never assign tasks or permit tasks to be performed that exceed medical restrictions
- Supervisors must share this information

Modified Duty Training

Providing supervisory and management personnel training on how to best respond to employees' work-related health and safety concerns should be an essential part of any modified duty program. Effective training of these individuals allows an organization to communicate a commitment to modified duty throughout all levels of employment. Further, when supervisors and management personnel are trained on how to respond to employees' health concerns, prompt injury management techniques can be implemented to both reduce claim costs and administer corrective actions.

Training goals:

- Instill an understanding of the importance of early reporting
- Develop strong relationships with the medical community
- Enhance the identification of root causes through proactive injury analysis
- It also raises awareness of ergonomics risk factors in the workplace
- Foster improved employee relationships that avoid blame
- Strengthen the relationship with the claims representative
- Strengthen supervisor's active listening skills as it pertains to obtaining proper