

## Structured Return to Work Program

### Guidelines

The policy of Tuolumne JPA member school districts is to return injured/temporarily-disabled employees back to the workplace as soon as is medically appropriate. Accordingly, we have implemented a Structured Return to Work (SRTW) program. The program is designed to meet the needs of both the District and our employees, by returning employees to productive job duties as quickly as possible following a work-related injury.

We have identified numerous possible temporary work assignments throughout our district operations. Our goal is to provide these and other short-term duties for our employees during their medical recovery period.

The District and Tuolumne JPA Return To Work (RTW) Coordinator will work closely with the employee, supervisor and treating physician for a speedy return to transitional and, ultimately, full duty work.

If it is determined that an employee can never return to his/her usual job due to permanent work restrictions, the District will evaluate our ability to accommodate the employee's disability under the appropriate federal and state guidelines.

### Initial Duration in the SRTW Program

District management, in consultation with the RTW Coordinator, may assign an employee who is unable to perform the full duties of his/her job an initial period up to 30 calendar days of available, productive

work within the employee's temporary work restrictions. Extensions beyond the initial 30 day period may be granted if agreed upon between the RTW Coordinator and District Administration. **Assignments extending beyond 90 calendar days is not recommended.**

### Program Eligibility

Employees who are temporarily unable to perform their usual job duties due to work-related illness or injury may be eligible for the SRTW program, depending on the medical restrictions and the availability of productive transitional work duties.

### Return to Work Preference

The order of preference for returning employees to transitional work is:

1. Temporarily modifying the employee's regular job duties, if appropriate and reasonable;
2. Assignment of predetermined temporary work assignments selected from the SRTW Program Manual. The manual provides a summary of these work assignments and their physical demands.

Some assignments may not be available at a given time. Management will determine their present work needs and availability of assignments.

### Treating Physician Reports

The treating physician's reports should provide work restrictions from each visit. If they do not, the RTW Coordinator will assist in gathering this information, in order to facilitate return to work.

## **SRTW Program Extensions**

The initial thirty calendar days may be extended for a maximum of 90 calendar days. All will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Extensions will be granted as approved in increments of no more than 30 days.

Criteria to be included when considering an extension include but are not limited to:

1. **Available Work** — Management staff will evaluate and determine if there is sufficient productive work available within the employee's physical restrictions.

2. **Employee's Medical Status** — The physician should provide sufficient documentation that the employee's medical condition is improving. The RTW Coordinator may request an additional medical evaluation or Functional Capacity Evaluation, to determine if the employee is progressing toward a return to regular duties.

3. **Full Duty Expectation** — At or before 90 days of transitional duty, the attending physician will be asked to review an essential job function description of the employee's regular duties and provide a statement as to whether or not the employee is expected to return to regular, full duty within a specified time during the extension period.

## **Program Responsibilities**

The success of this program requires the participation, support and cooperation of all employees.

### ***The Employee will:***

- Promptly report any realized or suspected work-related injury or illness to his/her direct supervisor;
- Actively participate with the supervisor, district management and/or RTW Coordinator in developing a temporary work assignment;

- Provide the treating physician with a **Physician Packet** to be provided by the supervisor at the time of initial injury reporting. This packet contains a **Work Status Report** to be completed by the physician at the time of visit. At all subsequent physician appointments, the employee shall take a Work Status Report for completion by the physician.
- Return the completed **Work Status Report** or equivalent medical report to the supervisor following all medical appointments. If the employee is unable to provide the report because of incapacity, he/she will contact the supervisor following the medical visit, to provide work status information;
- Complete the Modified Duty Agreement with the RTW Coordinator and supervisor;
- Contact the supervisor and the RTW Coordinator immediately if problems occur while in the SRTW program;
- As possible schedule all medical appointments outside of work hours;
- Keep all medical appointments and follow the physician's work restrictions on and off the job.

### ***The Supervisor will:***

- Ensure that daily assignments given to the employee are consistent with the employee's work restrictions;
- Check with the RTW Coordinator before changing any agreed upon temporary work assignments;
- Complete an initial Modified Duty Agreement with the RTW Coordinator at the time the employee returns to work;
- Complete subsequent Modified Duty Agreements if assignments are extended;
- Support the employee's daily work and related activities, to ensure that adequate training is provided and that activities do

not exceed the employee's physical abilities;

- Ensure the employee is provided with a **Work Status Report** for all physician appointments and that the employee is not returned to assignment until one has been received.
- Maintain contact with employees who are off work due to disability and communicate regularly with the RTW Coordinator on the status of restrictions and/or disability.

***District Management will:***

- Take an active interest in the program's success by maintaining contact with and supporting supervisors and the RTW Coordinator, and periodically reviewing program activities.

***Return To Work Coordinator will:***

- Provide case management services on all assigned cases and assist district staff in coordinating the employee's return to work in the SRTW program;
- Monitor the employee's progress with the employee, his/her supervisor, district management, the claims administrator and the treating physician for the duration of time in the SRTW program;
- Maintain ongoing communication with all parties, providing updates on work status, until the employee is returned to full duty or exits the SRTW program;

- Communicate with the claims administrator and the treating physician at significant intervals, i.e., follow-up appointments, completion of physical therapy regimen, to check for changes in the employee work restrictions;
- Assist with analyzing cases for extension of the term in the SRTW program;
- Notify the District Liaison immediately if the employee's physical restrictions are determined to be permanent.

***District Liaison will:***

- In consultation with the RTW Coordinator and the supervisor review all extensions in the SRTW program;
- Review all cases involving employees with permanent work restrictions upon notification from the RTW Coordinator and/or claims administrator, and assess the availability of permanent modified or alternate work, in accordance with all legal requirements, including the Fair Employment and Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.