

Return to Work Program Checklist

Introduction

A return to work program is one of the most important things you can implement to generate engagement with your employees and ensure minimal cost from a lost-time injury.

Return to work programs do many things, from outlining the procedures you expect your staff to follow in the event of an injury, to training management in how to handle someone returning on light duty. From frequent communication during a claim period to an appropriate workload when returning to work, having a checklist in place will help you to build and implement such a program, while ensuring every member of your team is on the same page about expectations.



Return to Work Policy in the Office

The first stage of crafting a strong return to work policy is ensuring you have a well-crafted, properly communicated policy in the office. There are three major components here to keep in mind, including:

Commitment

You need your entire team to sign on and commit to a return to work program from the moment it is implemented. To do this, you need to accurately communicate to each of them what that program means, how it will impact them and what the expectations are for both management and staff in the case of an injury.

You must also commit yourself to living up to the spirit of this agreement – to supporting and communicating with your staff every minute they are away, until they are ready to return.

Signatures

Don't just ask for commitment, though. Get it in writing. Signatures should be gathered from staff members indicating they have read and fully understand the return to work policy you are implementing. That includes onboarding documents for new staff that clearly indicate what the expectations will be in the case of an injury.

Posting and Education

Beyond initial commitment and agreement in writing, you need to take the time to fully communicate with your staff the nature of the agreement, reminding them that it is in force, and fully educating them on the processes you have put in place.

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Return to Work Program and Procedures

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☐ Roles and Responsibilities

Who in your organization will be responsible for executing the program outlined by this checklist? Who will oversee audits of each employee's specific situation to ensure the policy was adhered to correctly? Who will communicate with the employee during their injury period? Know the answers to these questions and make them part of your organization structure to avoid confusion or pieces falling through the cracks.

☐ Assigned Coordinator or Committee

Above the individuals who manage each of the cases that arise, who oversees the entirety of your return to work program? If you have a large enough staff for a human resources department, you will likely assign this to the head of that department, but for smaller businesses or those with multiple business units, how do you ensure there is a single coordinator or committee whose role it is to ensure proper implementation of these procedures?

☐ Procedures for Injury Reporting

When an injury is reported, what should be done? While the State and your insurance carrier have specific requirements, these are often insufficient to a comprehensive return to work program. Who should be notified, how much time is required before notification is made, what level of communication is needed from medical staff? These are important questions to answer and may vary depending on your business and the number of staff.

Communication – Who Communicates What to Who

Communication is the backbone of a good return to work program. Your employee should communicate immediately upon reporting an injury, after each doctor visit to provide an update on status and estimated time for return, upon confirmation of light duty requirements, and at set intervals in between. This not only allows you to plan accordingly and prepare a return program, but it keeps them engaged with their workplace and more likely to return and follow procedure.

Identifying Suitable Work

If altered duty is required by the injured employee's physician, suitable work needs to be identified. This may include slightly altered duties to avoid heavy lifting or moving equipment or something much stricter such as dedicated desk duty. Constant communication will make it easier to establish which will make the most sense and how to implement a good plan.

Monitoring RTW Plans Including How to Address Concerns

Your RTW plans should never be set in stone. There may be specific concerns, questions, or problems that an employee has that need to be addressed on a case by case basis. Have a system in place for hearing and addressing these concerns so you don't ignore the problems your staff are having.

Privacy and Protection of Confidential Materials

By requiring regular communication and requesting updates from physicians, you will be privy to confidential materials and private medical information from your staff at times. This information should be properly protected, stored in a secure location, and off limits to all but explicitly cleared managerial staff to access.

☐ Program Evaluation

When an employee has completed the RTW program, an evaluation should be completed to ensure all the objectives were properly met. Were they able to return as early as medically possible. Were all communication deadlines met? Have your program coordinator oversee these evaluations as they are completed.



Supporting Documents

As part of the enforcement process for your RTW program, you need to have supporting documents in place for injuries, plan summaries, and communications logging. Here are some of the things to ensure you have in place.

☐ Injury Package Including Instructions for Worker and Forms

In the event of an injury, you should have a package with explicit instructions for your employee. This should include:

- ☐ A summary of the RTW program.
- ☐ A list of contacts and timelines for requested followups.
- ☐ A procedure for voicing concerns or questions about returning.
- ☐ Forms required for workers' compensation filing, as well as any internal forms for logging updates.
- ☐ Any other instructions or summary of plan details they will need before returning to work.

☐ Written RTW Plan Template

In addition to this checklist and your RTW plan, you should have a written template in place that can be used as a baseline when establishing a new plan for an injured worker. Because each RTW plan will be slightly different, this will allow you to quickly implement a plan as soon as an injury occurs.

Communications Log

Create a formal log for all communication between your staff and the injured worker. This should be secure and only accessible to appropriate management staff to ensure protection of the worker's privacy.

List of Possible Suitable Work

Create a master list of all possible suitable work replacements. This will make it easier to evaluate and select replacement activities when someone is ready to return to work. It can often be difficult to do this on a case by case basis, so having a well-organized list of light duty, adjusted duty, and desk duty tasks within the skillsets of each of your workers, along with any additional training time needed for each task will help immensely.

RTW Plan Evaluation Form

For RTW plan evaluation, create a stock form that your coordinator and committee can use to process and review a completed program. This will allow for streamlined review at the end of a program and easier response when determining if the program template as a whole is sufficient.

Return to Work Education

As part of the policy in the office we discussed establishing clear posting and education procedures. That means having the following education programs in place for different parts of your staff.

☐ Program Information Included in Orientation Training

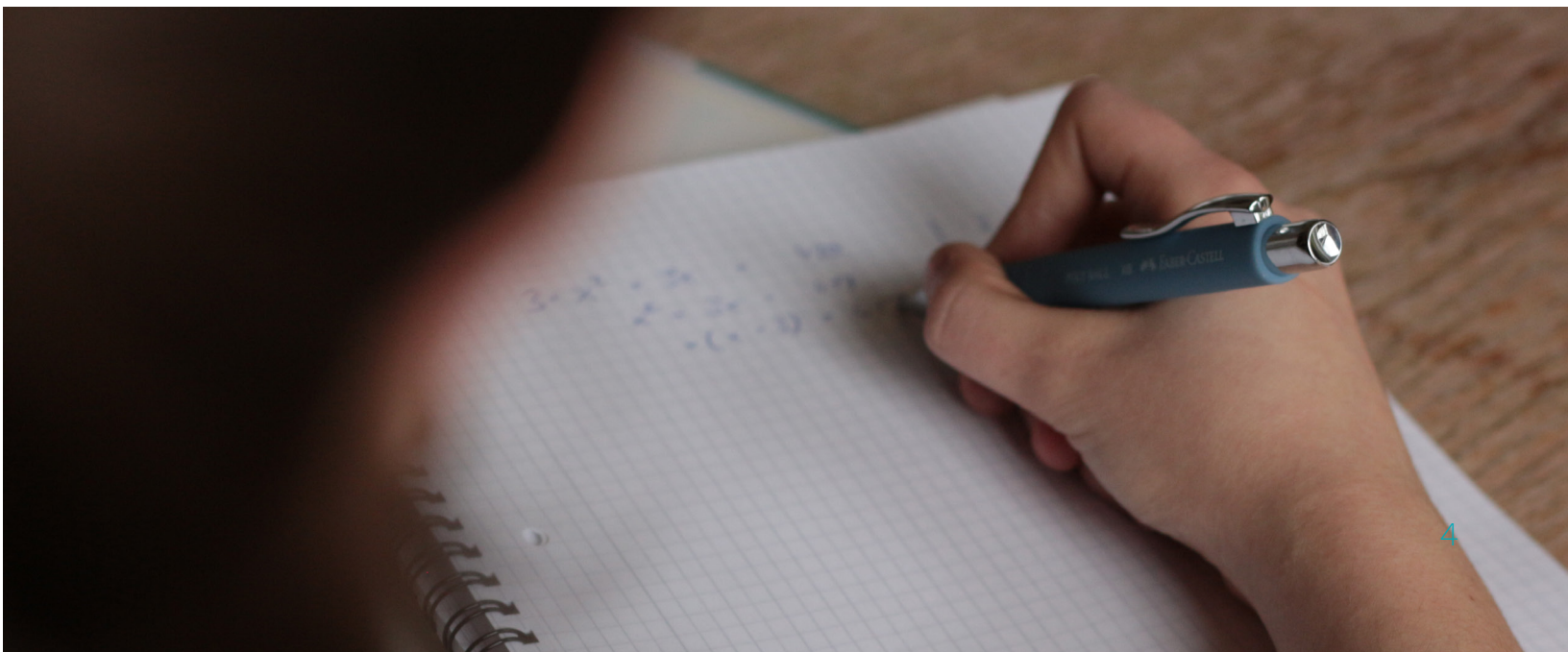
Provide as much information as you can in the orientation training. This includes printed forms that are relevant to the employee, a summary of the return to work program, the expectations of your staff in the event they are injured, and anything else that needs to be completed by them before they can start working.

☐ Education for Workers

Existing workers will need training as well. Set aside an hour or so to sit down with all of your current staff and review the process for return to work. Provide a summary of your expectations for them, how the process will work, and most importantly, how it differs from whatever procedures you were previously using. With clear communication and expectations, buy-in will be easier to get up front.

☐ Education for Management

Finally, provide comprehensive education for all members of your management team, including those who may not directly interact with a return to work program right now. This will ensure everyone understands what is expected of their teams, how they are supposed to followup, and what to do in the event of a problem or failure to followup by those team members.



The Importance of a Good Return to Work Program

A good return to work program can reduce the cost of your workers' compensation insurance, reduce or eliminate staffing problems when someone is injured, and improve morale for your entire team.

Having such a system in place is a vital part of running a successful business, and something your team will ultimately appreciate if properly implemented. Take the time to prepare your own based on the above checklist and you will reap the benefits in multiple areas of your business.

Interested in learning more about how return to work and smart in-house policies can reduce risk and improve your workers' compensation rates? Contact Radius Insurance today and ask to speak with a member of our team about your next steps.

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