

## RETURN-TO-WORK; A GREAT IDEA

We at the Covenant Group, are convinced that an employer who provides light, or restricted work for injured employees, enjoys numerous benefits. This is not just an opinion, it's something we see day in and day out. Consider:

- Unless an injured worker returns to the workplace within 60 days, chances of him/her ever returning drop dramatically. (resulting in a very expensive permanent disability situation.)
- After 6 months away from the workplace, only 50% chance of return.
- After 12 months, only a 10% chance of return.

### Some Return-to Work Benefits Include:

- "Test" of malingering potential. Injured employees who refuse light duty are more prone to being malingerers.
- Opportunity for employer to demonstrate true concern for workers' well-being.
- Promotion of rehabilitation and recovery.
- Lower medical and rehabilitation costs.
- Productivity.
- Morale improvement for the injured worker.
- Ability for the employer to monitor the injured employee's recovery progress.
- Decrease of WC claims costs, with resultant downstream WC premium savings.

*(Notice we're not just talking about 'feel-good' issues, but also hard dollars !)*

### Some common misconceptions (and truths) about Return-to-Work / Light Duty:

**Misconception:** *We've already got too many "programs" around here, and don't need any more paper.*

**Truth:** While it is true a written, planned program works best, in many cases a Light Duty "program" can be nothing more than a management understanding of the benefits and principles of Return-to-Work, how it works, and the commitment to 'just do it', when light-duty recommendations are made by WC physicians.

**Misconception:** *It will get me into an Americans With Disabilities (ADA) "situation".*

**Truth:** Light-duty and ADA "reasonable accommodation" are two entirely separate issues. Generally, light duty is a temporary assignment, for a relatively short period. ADA accommodations are made for serious, permanent disabilities that impair major life activities.

**Misconception:** *I'll have to devise a whole new job each time an employee needs light duty.*

**Truth:** The vast majority of light-duty restrictions require accommodating only one or two factors, such as "no lifting over 10 pounds", or the like. In many cases, if you break the jobs down into individual **tasks**, you'll see that only one or two tasks within the employee's normal job are affected, and can be handled in some other way.

**Misconception:** *Once an employee gets into a "cushy" light-duty job, s/he'll never leave it, and I'll be stuck with it.*

**Truth:** Light duty is always defined by, and monitored by the attending physician. An employee on light duty is periodically monitored by the physician for improvement, and is released for full-duty as soon as medically indicated.

**Misconception:** *We're a union company. Our union won't allow us to pay lower rates, or move employees between classifications, or between bargaining groups.*

**Truth:** Any Local that objects to a Return-to-Work program should be referred to its national body for guidance. Return-to-Work is universally recognized as a very positive influence on an injured worker (as well as benefiting the employer). Labor unions, whose major purpose for existence is the benefit of the workers they represent, should not only "tolerate" Return-to-Work programs, but enthusiastically promote, and assist in such programs' implementation and operation. It is strongly suggested that management approach labor representatives to solicit their input, and assistance in making Return-to-Work a positive force in your workplace.

**Misconception:** *I might be willing to place a worker in a light-duty position, but I can't afford pay them their full pay, for the decreased productivity.*

**Truth:** Talk to your WC insurer's claims professional. In many cases, states' WC plans provide for "make-up" pay to replace some, or all of the injured employees' decreased earnings. The goal of getting them back to the workplace, and doing some productive work is that important !