

## Return to Work: Determining Alternate/Modified Work

It is recommended that the employer involve the injured worker in developing the return-to-work (RTW) plan and modified/alternative work opportunities. The injured worker can provide input on proposed modified/alternative work identified by the employer, and may also identify additional opportunities. Any issues or concerns the worker may have can also be addressed at the planning stage.

**Modified work:** Work duties or tasks, which may or may not be associated with an injured worker's pre-injury job, that have been changed or modified to accommodate the injured worker's medical abilities so that they may safely return to work. Modification of work can include, but is not limited to, changes to the work environment, work hours, tools and equipment used, and job design/work organization.

**Alternate work:** Work duties or tasks not associated with an injured worker's pre-injury job that accommodate the injured worker's medical abilities to allow him/her to safely return to work.

The Saskatchewan WCB requires that any alternate/modified work that comprises an injured worker's RTW plan be **suitable**, meaning the work is:

- Within the medical abilities of the injured worker: does not place the injured worker at risk of re-injury or interfere with his/her ability to recover.
- Safe: does not endanger the health or safety of the injured worker or his/her coworkers.
- Within the skills and abilities of the injured worker.
- Productive: contributes to the objectives or operations of the employer.

The ideal RTW plan keeps the injured worker performing modified work in his/her pre-injury job position. That is not always an option. Alternate/modified work may be sought from other positions in an injured worker's pre-injury department/area, or from positions in other departments/areas within the workplace. In some cases, a RTW plan may encompass numerous tasks bundled together from many different departments/areas.

In determining alternate/modified work for an injured worker's RTW plan, the following hierarchy should be followed:

1. Worker's pre-injury job with modifications
2. Alternate job, no modifications
3. Alternate job, with modifications
4. Re-bundled work tasks (alternate and/or modified) from across the workplace



In **re-bundling**, the injured worker can be assigned work tasks from his/her pre-injury job position, work unit/department or across the workplace that are within his/her medical abilities. The redistribution of work must not create unsafe conditions for any worker.

**Graduated RTW (GRTW):** The gradual increase of an injured worker's hours of work and/or work activities, until the injured worker is able to return to full hours and duties. GRTW may involve job tasks from the injured worker's pre-injury job, or alternate work from other positions within the place of employment.

- GRTW may be suitable if an injured worker is medically capable of performing all of his/her pre-injury job tasks, but lacks endurance, or is in a treatment program. In such situations, it is usually the hours worked that are adjusted.
- If an injured worker is not medically capable of safely performing certain pre-injury job tasks, a GRTW plan may bundle the work tasks that the injured worker is able to perform safely, and gradually add more tasks as the worker recovers.
- GRTW may also be a combination of modified hours and tasks.

**Potential modifications to methods or equipment to enable an injured worker to perform tasks:**

- a portable hoist/crane to lift objects, rather than manually
- a trolley to transport materials, rather than manually
- rotation through a variety of tasks
- conducting work from a seated, rather than standing, position
- cordless headset
- wheeled laptop bag
- chair with adjustable lumbar support
- adjustable workstation
- tools requiring less physical force to operate
- tools with ergonomically designed handles
- localized heating source to raise room temperature
- scent-free workplace
- work-from-home option
- flexible work hours
- additional rest breaks
- conducting work from an alternate facility/location



### **Additional task opportunities suitable for RTW:**

- Training and/or refresher courses that may be required in the near future or build skills for existing and future positions.
- Any type of value-add work that contributes to the employer's goals and objectives.
- Tasks that are deferred for other priorities, such as document management and storage, inventory control or customer surveys.
- Supporting other areas that need to complete deferred tasks that are above the worker's abilities. Support may include telephone duties, responding to customer enquiries, etc.

