



Tips and Tidbits
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Question: What is involved in returning injured employees back to work? What role does the employee's supervisor play?

The Light Duty Program, an integral component of the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA), offers injured workers the opportunity to return to work performing light duty assignments provided the employee's condition has improved and the appropriate medical documentation from the attending/treating physician that outlines the employee's limitations exists and is provided to Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC) staff. If the physician places restrictions on specific duties the injured worker can/cannot perform, CPAC staff, in conjunction with the injured employee's supervisor, a field nurse (if assigned by Department of Labor), and an Occupational Health Nurse designated to work with the Injury Compensation Program, will develop light duty assignments for the employee to perform upon the employee's return to work. Not surprisingly, the supervisor's role is critical. Not only are they part of the team responsible for identifying potential assignments/positions against which these employees may be utilized, but they are also responsible for ensuring adherence to the prescribed medical limitations.

Supervisors often wrestle with the appropriateness of developing light duty work for their injured employees. The reasons cited are varied and many; however, the biggest *misconception* is that no light/restricted duty work exists in the organization, when, in actuality, it comes down to a matter of willingness to make accommodations. Accommodation is any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability/injury to accomplish employment opportunities. It could involve permitting the injured employee to elevate an injured leg while seated at his desk; allowing more frequent work breaks, or coordinating through the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program* (CAP) to secure an alternative keyboard, a screen reader, hearing aids, or assistive listening devices. It should be remembered that the Department of the Army is paying the injured worker whether the employee returns to work or stays at home. In fact, employees not assigned light duty work [when conditions warrant] are paid a tax-free percentage of their basic salary [to the tune of 75% for those employees with dependents and 66 2/3% for employees without dependents] to sit at home. Through accommodation, supervisors ensure more prudent use of tax dollars. Most injured employees can do "something".

While on restricted duties, the supervisor must see to it that the employee abides by those restrictions, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. For example, if a temporary lifting restriction is imposed, the supervisor must ensure that the injured worker is not required to lift anything exceeding the weight limit that the physician has indicated. If the restrictions are permanent or seem unreasonable, the job may need to be modified. In these situations, the Installation Compensation Program Administrator, located in the CPAC, should be consulted. If the position has to be completely restructured/rewritten as a result of permanent restrictions imposed by the physician, the new position description must be reviewed by the physician to ensure the employee's limitations are properly accommodated, and once approved, subsequently offered to the employee in writing.

As outlined in the Office of Workers Compensation procedures, in order to be valid, an offer of light-duty must be in writing and must include the following:

- a description of the duties to be performed;
- the specific physical requirements of the position and any special demands of the workload or unusual working conditions;
- the organizational and geographical location of the job;
- the date on which the job will be first be available, and
- the date by which a response to the job offer is required

An effective Return to Work Program requires concerted, ongoing support from Management at all levels. In turn, the FECA Coordinator, Occupational Health members, medical staff, private and agency physicians, and CPAC representatives all work toward accommodating the needs of injured employees with the goal of bringing these employees back to work in some capacity.

For additional information concerning returning injured employees back to work, contact your servicing HR Specialist at the CPAC.

*Managers and supervisors can learn how assistive technology enables people with disabilities to become, or remain, valuable employees. For more information visit the CAPTEC website at www.tricare.mil/cap/acc_sol/CAPTEC_appointments.cfm.

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