## RETURN TO WORK SAFELY WITH SUITABLE MODIFIED WORK

# **TOOLBOX SAFETY TALK**

### **SUITABLE MODIFIED WORK**

Suitable modified work allows a worker to return to work as they recover from an injury or illness.

Identifying suitable work to build into a return to work plan involves the injured worker, the employer (human resources and the worker's manager), health care providers, and the WSCC, all working together as a team.

The modified work needs to be safe and it must be meaningful. That is, the work should serve a valuable function to the organization.

Modified suitable work can include:

- Changing the job tasks or functions
- Lessening the workload
- Changing the work area and environment or the equipment the worker uses
- Taking on a co-worker's job tasks
- Cross training or job shadowing
- Work of a vacant position
- Projects the employer needs completed

#### **JOB DEMANDS ANALYSIS**

A job demands analysis (JDA) is a priority step in assigning suitable modified work. It identiies potential strains job tasks may have on the worker that the employer must address.

#### A JDA outlines:

- Essential job tasks versus non-essential job
- Equipment, tools, and supplies used to complete the work
- Physical demands (including strength requirements, postures, and repetitive tasks)
- Sensory demands, cognitive demands
- **Environmental conditions**

Modifying the conditions and procedures for the recovering worker reduces the risk of re-injury. Employers may consider implementing the modification for all workers to reduce future risk of injury.

#### SAFETY OF ALL WORKERS

Each party involved in the return to work plan has a responsibility to provide clear communication to ensure that everyone knows how to manage the progression of the worker's recovery.

The modifications for the returning worker must be safe for them and their coworkers.

#### For example:

John is an employee in the process of returning to work after a back injury. Based on John's physical abilities, his doctor determined that he should not lift more than 20 pounds at time for a few weeks. Before his injury, John and his coworkers regularly lifted 50 pound loads.

It is unsafe for John's co-workers to pick up the slack by lifting the extra weight during John's return with modified duties.

John's JDA will highlight the tasks John can perform, while making sure the other employees stay safe too.

Possible modifications could include: having another worker help him with lifts, providing a cart to move loads, and/or providing a lift or hoist for heavier weights.

These modifications would allow John to complete his work safely without overloading his co-workers.

#### **DEMONSTRATE**

Ask workers to describe potential modifications to their job tasks in the workplace. Identifying modified work may reveal safer ways to do the work for everyone. For example, is there equipment or a process that would benefit everyone, not just an injured worker?