



## **WHITMAN COUNTY RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM**

Policy#: POL-530-HR

Effective Date: February 1, 2018

Cancels Resolution #:

Resolution#: 079881

### **Definitions**

- Regular Duty – Performance of all duties and tasks of the position for which the employee is employed. Regular duty entails performing all essential and nonessential functions of the employee's regular job.
- Temporary Assignment – Performance of a temporary job assignment that is intended to return an injured employee to work at less than his or her full duties when a compensable injury prevents the employee from working regular duty. Two types of temporary assignments are modified duty and alternate duty.
- Temporary Modified Duty – Performance of some of the essential and nonessential functions and tasks of the regular job duties for which the employee is employed. Modified duty allows the employee to return to current employment in his or her regular job, and perform those duties and tasks that are within the capabilities of the employee, given the restrictions to duty imposed by the treating physician. Modified duty is a temporary arrangement to last a maximum of ninety (90) calendar days or until the injured employee can resume full duty, whichever comes first.
- Temporary Alternate Duty – Performance of the essential functions of a job or position other than the position for which the employee is employed. Alternate duty allows the employee to temporarily perform other duties and tasks that are within the restrictions to duty imposed by the treating physician. Such alternate duty may be physically located in the same department or in some other department. Alternate duty is a temporary arrangement to last a maximum of ninety (90) calendar days or until the injured employee can resume full activities of his/her regular job, whichever comes first.

## **Policy Statement**

Whitman County recognizes the benefits of providing temporary, transitional work to employees who are unable to perform their regular duties due to occupational illness or injury. The objective of this policy is to reduce the employee's lost work days and expedite the return to regular duties.

## **Scope**

The County's Return to Work Program applies to all County employees who sustain an occupational illness or injury. Transitional duty work is temporary in nature. It is not intended for employees with permanent restrictions or who need accommodations for extended periods of time. In most cases, employees who are unable to return to their pre-injury jobs within 90 days of their date of injury or illness will no longer qualify for transitional duty.

## **Transitional Duty**

Temporary modified or alternate duty, limited or restricted work, is intended to be a temporary job placement during recovery from a temporary disability due to an injury or illness. The Return to Work Program involves the consideration of temporary work assignments identified and arranged by the department head(s) or designee(s). Modified or alternate duty will be discontinued upon the employee being released by their treating physician to return to regular full duty, or upon completion of a maximum of 90-calendar days from the time the employee returns to work in the modified or alternate duty assignment, whichever occurs first. The department head or designee shall review all cases where the employee has not been released to full duty within the 90-calendar day period and determine if an extension of the modified or alternate duty assignment is possible. If it is determined that the employee is unable to be released to full duty within the subsequent 90-calendar days, the department head or designee reserves the right to discontinue or extend modified/alternate duty as appropriate.

A department that cannot provide duties within the scope of the employee's restrictions will consult with the Human Resources Department for possible alternate duty in another department.

A temporary modified or alternate duty assignment might be offered when the following conditions are met:

1. There is work, part time or full time, to be performed, as determined by the injured employee's department head or designee or another department can provide a suitable alternate duty assignment.
2. The alternate work can be performed within the medical limitations and restrictions identified by the employee's treating physician.
3. The employee's physician projects the disability will last less than 90 days.

## **PROGRAM CRITERIA**

Employee Participation in the Return to Work Program: In order for an employee of Whitman County to be eligible to participate in the Return to Work Program, the employee must have:

1. Sustained a compensable injury as defined by Washington State Labor and Industries that results in lost time away from work.
2. Work can be performed within the medical limitations and restrictions identified by the employee's treating physician or health care provider.
3. There is work, part time or full time, to be performed, as determined by the injured employee's department head or designee, or another department can provide a suitable alternate duty assignment. Alternate duty assignments are not available at all times and cannot be guaranteed in each circumstance. Whitman County will not create a position, or bump another employee from a position in order to accommodate the injured or ill employee.
4. Employees will maintain the same job classification and be paid the same hourly rate of pay during a modified or alternate duty assignment as paid in his or her regular position at the time of injury or illness. It is not the County's intent to assign an employee the full range of duties of a higher classification and will not be eligible for out of class pay.
5. Sick leave, vacation leave, or personal leave and other benefits will continue to accrue while on modified or alternate duty assignment in accordance with County policy and applicable collective bargaining agreements.
6. The employee's home department will be responsible for the employee's payroll during temporary modified or alternate assignment. The department to which the employee is assigned will be responsible for providing supervision. Time cards will be initialed by the department where the employee is assigned and then forwarded to the home department for department head signature.

## **PROGRAM COORDINATION**

1. An employee must provide the department head or designee with written work restrictions including prognosis from their treating physician.
  
2. The department head or designee in consultation with Human Resources must grant approval for an employee to return to work in any modified or alternate duty assignment. The employee must sign an agreement accepting the modified or temporary duty assignment.
  
3. Such approvals shall be based on the ability of the employee to perform some of the essential functions of the assignment within the restrictions imposed by the treating physician and without aggravating the existing injury or illness or cause an exacerbation of the injury or illness based on the treating physician's evaluation.
  
4. Based on the treating physician's written opinion, employees might be offered temporarily modified or alternate return to work positions, as identified through this program, which accommodates their restrictions. Failure to accept modified or alternate duty assignments may result in the loss of temporary workers' compensation benefits.
  
5. Hours worked and wages earned during alternate assignments will be reported to Human Resources upon request. Human Resources will use such information for necessary reporting to Labor and Industries.