

PHYSICAL PLANT
OPERATING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

PP/OP 02.03: Early Return to Work and Alternate/Light Duty Program

DATE: December 10, 2010

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Physical Plant Operating Policy and Procedure (PP\OP) is to provide an employer-guided systematic approach to returning temporarily disabled employees to less physically demanding work situations, allowing the employee to contribute to the organization while retaining his/her sick leave. This policy and procedure applies to workplace injuries only.

REVIEW

This PP\OP will be reviewed in December of each even numbered year (ENY) by the associate director for business office and material resources - physical plant and recommendations forwarded to the managing director for physical plant.

APPLICABILITY

This policy and procedure is applicable to all Physical Plant sections and personnel.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. General

To return injured workers back to regular duty as quickly and efficiently as possible through the use of a flexible, integrated protocol that provides needed medical care and medical rehabilitation while maintaining normal work habits.

2. Definitions

a. Early Return to Work - A program establishing a time based, outcome-driven managed care system designed to quickly and effectively return employees with workplace injuries to their regular job in order to contain costs. To drive this system, the Physical Plant has established a workers' compensation primary care physician as well as a panel of specialists and therapists. All workplace injuries will be seen by the established physician panel.

b. Light Duty - Also known as modified duty. In this situation an employee

returns from a work-related injury to modified or restricted duties in the position they already hold. Light duty is only available to employees involved in worker's comp injuries.

- c. Alternate Duty - A situation where temporary duty restrictions resulting from a work-related injury preclude return to duty in the employee's previous position with his/her home section and a temporary assignment to an alternate position is offered.
 - d. Home Section - The section within the Physical Plant to which the employee is assigned during his/her normal employment (BMC, Utilities, Services, Engineering, Material Resources).
 - e. Hosting Section/Department - The section within the Physical Plant or the university department that provides alternate duty to an injured employee.
3. Early Return to Work Policy

All Physical Plant personnel who are injured on the job will be placed in the Early Return to Work (ERTW) program implemented through alternate/light duty assignments and must be treated by the established panel of approved workers' compensation physicians and therapists. The program has the elements of a preferred provider organization, a case management program, and a utilization review program. Early intervention means that employees receive less treatment over a shorter period of time thereby reducing costs significantly.

4. Alternate/Light Duty Program

Physical Plant will provide alternate or light duty employment to temporarily disabled employees who are able to meet the conditions set forth below:

- a. Eligibility - Employees eligibility shall be governed by the following rules:
 - (1) The employee must have a temporary rather than a permanent disability.
 - (2) Alternate/light duty is the Physical Plant's option per TTU OP 70.39.
 - (3) The temporarily disabled employee's home section director must approve and sign the ***Alternate/Light Duty Notification*** form (Attachment A) and submit it to the Safety Office
 - (4) The temporarily disabled employee's home section director must approve and sign the ***Bona Fide Offer of Employment*** (Attachment B) and submit it to the Safety Office

- (5) The Safety Office will coordinate with the attending physician, the managing director for resource office and the hosting department in preparing and gaining approval of an Alternate Duty Job Description (Attachment C). (This step will be omitted if Light Duty is found within the employee's current area).
- (6) Alternate/light duty is not available to employees returning from Leave of Absence that is not related to a workers' compensation injury.
- (7) Alternate duty is not available to employees who are permanently disabled.
- (8) The employee must assist the safety office in obtaining medical approval from his/her attending physician concerning his/her ability to perform the assigned alternate duty tasks (See Employee Responsibilities).
- (9) The employee who does not agree/accept a bona fide offer of employment that has been approved by the physician may be subject to administrative action (i.e. termination) and/or a reduction in income benefits as allowed by the Texas Department of Insurance, Workers' Compensation Division.

b. Length and Frequency of Alternate/Light Duty

Alternate and/or light duty will not exceed three periods of four weeks in length (3 calendar months). At the end of this period, the case will be reviewed using the current physical restrictions, prognosis for length of recovery, and the continued availability of the modified duty tasks assigned. If the employee is unable to return to unrestricted pre-injury/illness job duties then the alternate/light duty may be extended for an additional three months. In no case should alternate/light duty last longer than the time needed for recuperation and at the end of the six calendar months, the employee's case will be reviewed by University Human Resources in accordance with OP 70.01.

c. Follow-up - Medical Appointments

- (1) The injured party must notify the Safety Office of all scheduled doctor appointments.
- (2) A representative of the Physical Plant will accompany injured personnel to their doctor appointments when required.
- (3) The injured party must provide the safety office a medical report from the attending physician following each doctor appointment but not less than once every 30 days throughout the duration of their treatment.

- d. Termination of Alternate/Light Duty Status will happen under the following circumstances;
 - (1) If the physician's recommendation expires or is rescinded.
 - (2) When three four-week periods (3 months) have expired or at the end of the sixth calendar month if an extension is permitted.

5. Alternate/Light Duty Procedures

- a. Any employee who suffers a temporary disability will provide a physician's medical restrictions to the Physical Plant safety office.
- b. The safety office will review the medical restrictions and coordinate with the home section director to make a determination of whether the injured party is eligible to work under the light duty or alternate duty programs.
- c. LIGHT DUTY - If the employee is recommended for light duty:
 - (1) The home section will modify the injured employee's current job description to comply with the medical restriction.
 - (2) The safety office will prepare the *Alternate/Light Duty Notification* form (Attachment A), the *Bona Fide Offer of Employment* (Attachment B) and coordinate with the home section director for approval of light duty.
 - (3) The safety office will track the light duty termination dates and notify the applicable section directors (if the employee has not returned to full duty).
 - (4) Additional light duty assignments may be requested pending appropriate administrative approvals.
- d. ALTERNATE DUTY - If the employee is recommended for alternate duty:
 - (1) The safety office will prepare the *Alternate/Light Duty Notification* form (Attachment A) and coordinate with the home section director for approval of alternate duty.
 - (2) The safety office will prepare the *Bona Fide Offer of Employment* form (Attachment B) and the *Alternate Duty Job Description* (Attachment C) based on the physician's medical restrictions.

- (3) The safety office will forward the alternate duty job description to the attending physician for review and certification that the tasks defined may be performed and are within the injured employee's medical restrictions. The physician will sign the job description reflecting approval.
- (4) If the physician modifies the job description, the Physical Plant must determine whether the modification is acceptable and if additional duties are added or revised.
- (5) The safety office will also coordinate the approval signature on the ***Alternate Duty Job Description*** (Attachment C) with the Texas Tech University managing director for human resource services.
- (6) Once approved by the physician and managing director for human resource services, the safety office will forward the *Alternate/Light Duty Notification* form (Attachment A), the ***Bona Fide Offer of Employment*** form (Attachment B) and the ***Alternate Duty Job Description*** (Attachment C) to the section director for signature and approval. The section director will then make the bona fide offer of employment to the injured employee.
- (7) Upon acceptance of alternate duty by employee, the bona fide offer of employment and job description should be returned to the safety office.
- (8) The Physical Plant maintains the right to withdraw the offer of alternate duty if the job description, as modified by the physician, is unacceptable to meet operational needs.
- (9) The safety office will track the alternate duty termination dates as specified above and notify the applicable section directors (if the employee has not returned to full duty).

6. Responsibilities

- a. The managing director for physical plant is responsible for establishing procedures whereby injured employees who are not totally disabled may return to work and perform duties until such time as they are able to return to their regular job.

b. Employee Responsibilities

The employee is responsible for:

- (1) Reporting to the Physical Plant safety office to complete all required paperwork and assist in the investigation process.
- (2) Seeing the established occupational medicine physician who is the Physical Plant worker's compensation primary care physician.
- (3) Having a realistic idea of the kind of work s/he will be capable of performing.
- (4) Assistance in working with the attending physician to endorse the alternate duty document.
- (5) Giving the alternate/light duty his/her full attention and best effort.
- (6) Participating in the alternate/light duty program after the physician provides restrictions.
- (7) Notifying the safety coordinator of all scheduled appointments with the attending physician.
- (8) Providing the safety office a medical report from the attending physician following each physician's visit, but not less than once every 30 days throughout the duration of relevant medical restriction.
- (9) Either returning to regular duty, seeking reassignment to a position that meets the employee's capabilities, or being placed on disability leave at the end of alternate/light duty assignment.

c. Safety Coordinator Responsibilities

The safety coordinator is responsible for:

- (1) Completing and processing all workers' compensation claim and investigation forms.
- (2) Being present for all attending physician appointments (or a Physical Plant representative).
- (3) Ensuring the attending physician is aware of the early return to work

program.

- (4) Providing the section director with the employee medical restrictions and coordinating the early return to work of the injured employee.
- (5) Preparing the *Alternate/Light Duty Notification form* (Attachment A), the *Bona Fide Offer of Employment* form (Attachment B) and the *Alternate Duty Job Description* form (Attachment C).
- (6) Processing appropriate paperwork with the university Personnel Office, the attending physician, Department of Risk Management, and applicable section directors.
- (7) Expediting all actions in association with the early return to work program.
- (8) Tracking alternate/light duty termination dates and notifying the appropriate section directors.

d. Home Section Responsibilities

The home section or area director/manager is responsible for:

- (1) Maintaining a list of alternate duty job processes.
- (2) Making the determination of whether the injured party is eligible to work under alternate or light duty.
- (3) Modifying injured job description for light duty when applicable.
- (4) Offering temporary alternate duty, when applicable.
- (5) Coordinating with the safety office to complete the *Alternate/Light Duty Notification* form (Attachment A), *Bona Fide Offer of Employment* form (Attachment B) and *Alternate Duty Job Description* (Attachment C).
- (6) Ensuring the attending physician is aware of the early return to work program.

e. Hosting Section/Department Responsibilities

The hosting section/department or area director/manager is responsible for:

- (1) Maintaining a list of alternate duty job processes.
- (2) Accepting alternate/light duty candidates on a voluntary basis.
- (3) Assist in the development an alternate/light duty job description.

RESPONSIBILITIES

<u>POSITION</u>	<u>SECTION</u>	<u>MONTH</u>
Associate Director for Business Office and Material Resources - Physical Plant	Review	Dec (ENY)

Approved: _____
Reviewer

Approved: _____
Managing Director for Physical Plant