

Temporary modified work

Your employee has suffered a work injury or illness. What can you do to support him/her? One of the most effective ways to support your employee is offering temporary modified work. Modified work helps your employee return to work while recovering and provides the opportunity to continue contributing to the workplace. It also reduces claims costs for you which may have a positive impact on your premiums.

What is temporary modified work?

Temporary modified work includes any changes to regular job duties, as a result of an injury. This includes changes in:

- Tasks or functions.
- Workload (e.g., hours or schedules).
- Environment or work area.
- Equipment.

It can also include:

- Work normally performed by others.
- Work specifically designated as a modified work program.

What does modified work need to be?

Modified work needs to be:

- Achievable - given your employee's injury, he/she must be able to physically do the duties.
- Safe - your modified work plan should not endanger your employee's recovery and safety or the safety of others.
- Constructive - your modified work plan should contribute to your employee's skill development and return to full duties.
- Productive - your employee's duties should be meaningful to the organization.

The modified work should not create financial hardship for your employee (e.g., a shift change that requires additional childcare costs). The appendix outlines different modified work scenarios.

Why offer modified work?

Modified work benefits both you and your employee by:

- Retaining an experienced employee.
- Decreasing your employee's time away from work.
- Strengthening employee relations by showing an injury doesn't threaten job security.
- Boosting employee morale.
- Maintaining a reputation as a supportive employer.
- Increasing your employee's independence.
- Reducing any additional hiring or training costs.
- Reducing costs associated with claims.

Appendix

Here are five modified work scenarios:

1. Modified work that is normally performed by others

Ray works as a carpenter for a large construction company and injures his right arm while moving some equipment. The doctor has confirmed that Ray's injury needs some time to heal before he can return to his pre-accident employment. Ray's employer suggests that he return to work in a modified capacity and offers Ray a temporary position delivering orientation sessions to new employees. The regular trainer is working on another assignment in the company's head office. Is this reasonable?

Likely, as the assignment meets the conditions laid out in the opening paragraph above, and are consistent with the purpose of temporary modified work. The work is appropriate to Ray's physical and medical condition and has been set up to ensure it does not aggravate the injury. Orientation for new employees is a regular part of the company's operations, and Ray's employer has made the suggestion knowing that Ray has the skills necessary to deliver training in a classroom setting. Ray is looking forward to sharing his knowledge with new employees until he can return to his regular job. Although this injury may have resulted in no time lost from work, it is a disabling injury and it must be reported as a modified work claim.

2. Modified work not immediately available

Dave works from Wednesday to Sunday as a driver for the XYZ company. On Friday afternoon, Dave is on the road when another driver runs a stop sign and hits Dave's vehicle. Dave escapes serious injury, but his right hand and wrist are badly sprained and he is unable to drive. Dave's employer offers him modified work at the company's head office, which Dave accepts. The facility doesn't operate on the weekends so Dave is unable to start the modified work until Monday. What is the status of Dave's claim?

Dave's claim is a time loss claim since Dave misses two normal work days as the modified work is not available on the weekend. Under such circumstances, workers are sometimes encouraged to take vacation days to cover the period until modified work is available. This is not an appropriate practice. All injuries with time loss for more than the day of the accident must be reported to WCB in accordance with the Workers' Compensation Act.

If Dave had been injured at the beginning of his shift on Wednesday, and was medically fit for work in the modified position the next day, there could be no time lost from work. Provided it is suitable work and did not result in financial hardship, Dave's shift could be changed to accommodate the availability of the modified work (Monday to Friday instead of Wednesday to Sunday) until he is able to return to his regular duties.

3. Changes in regular duties

Two health care providers have nurses with work-related back injuries. Neither nurse misses time from work, but they can't lift patients so other nurses have to provide assistance. **Employer A marks this as modified work while Employer B does not. Which is correct?**

Employer A is correct. The nurses have had to eliminate regular tasks from their work routines as a result of work-related injuries and the injuries are considered to be disabling.

4. No change in regular duties

A foreman who supervises sites hurts his back helping an employee move some materials. His doctor advises him not to do any heavy lifting for five days. Technically, he is still able to do his job as he misses no time from work and is still able to supervise the sites. Is this a modified work or a no time loss claim?

It is reasonable to record this as a no time loss claim on the employer's report because the foreman is able to continue with his normal job duties without any modifications. This might be viewed as modified work if the circumstances show

that the foreman is expected to help move materials on a regular basis or if the company has to get someone to fill in or assist with activities that the foreman is unable to complete because of his work-related injury.

5. Unable to rotate duties

A production worker has a work-related soft tissue injury. The doctor recommends that the worker's exposure to a certain type of repetitious activity be reduced while the injury heals. The worker is trained in several production positions that she normally performs either as part of a rotation or for relief purposes. Some of these positions are considered suitable given the worker's injury. The worker is assigned to one of these production positions full-time on a temporary basis. Is this modified work?

Probably, if the worker normally does a variety of production tasks in rotation and, because of the injury, is not able to perform some of those tasks, then the injury is disabling and the temporary assignment is considered modified work.

For more information on WCB policies, go to our web site at <https://www.wcb.ab.ca/about-wcb/policy-manual/>

