



The **ROLE**
of the
**RETURN
TO WORK
CO-ORDINATOR**

• Injury •
Management •





Please note

This information is for guidance only and is not to be taken as an expression of the law. It should be read in conjunction with the *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*, the *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Regulations 2001* and any other relevant legislation. Copies of the legislation can be purchased from Print Applied Technology: call (03) 6233 3289 or freecall 1800 030 940. It is also available on the Internet at www.thelaw.tas.gov.au

This guide was produced by staff from WorkCover Tasmania.

We welcome your feedback on this guide.
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INTRODUCTION

The successful implementation of the Tasmanian Return to Work and Injury Management Model (the Model) requires many of its key features to be incorporated into the *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (the Act).

Amendments to the Act took effect 1 July 2010 and provide the necessary legislative framework to implement the Model. These amendments introduce a number of changes for injury management and return to work.

The requirement for employers to appoint a Rehabilitation Co-ordinator remains unchanged; it is now termed a “Return to Work Co-ordinator”.

This guide will help Return to Work Co-ordinators, employers and Injury Management Co-ordinators understand the role of the Return to Work Co-ordinator.

WHAT IS A RETURN TO WORK CO-ORDINATOR?

A Return to Work Co-ordinator (RTW Co-ordinator) is someone who provides an injured worker with workplace-based support and assistance.

RTW Co-ordinators help injured workers achieve the best possible return to work outcome through their intimate knowledge and understanding of the various jobs, processes, people and management systems within the workplace.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Section 143D of the Act requires employers with more than 50 workers to appoint a RTW Co-ordinator. Where an injured worker has suffered a significant injury (that is, is likely to be totally or partially incapacitated for more than 5 working days) employers must assign them to the appointed RTW Co-ordinator.

Employers with less than 50 workers are also encouraged to consider the benefits of appointing and training an existing worker to undertake this valuable role.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF THE RTW CO-ORDINATOR?

The RTW Co-ordinator may be responsible for some or all of the following functions:

- ▮ assisting in developing and implementing timely return to work plans and injury management plans (see *Further Resources* on page 9).
- ▮ assisting in identifying timely suitable and meaningful duties
- ▮ assisting the injured worker to carry out their designated duties in a safe and appropriate manner
- ▮ providing the injured worker with moral support in the form of reassurance and encouragement in their treatment and return to work
- ▮ monitoring the injured worker's progress
- ▮ actively promoting injury management and return to work processes and positively influencing worker perceptions

- ▄ providing input into workplace health and safety, and preparing and maintaining injury management programs, such as developing an injury management policy and associated processes (see *Further Resources* on page 9).
- ▄ training and educating line managers, supervisors and workers about injury management and return to work processes
- ▄ assisting in regular monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of workplace injury management programs against outcomes
- ▄ collating and maintaining relevant documentation.

HOW WILL A RTW CO-ORDINATOR COMMUNICATE?

Effective and regular communication is critical to ensuring that injured workers are fully supported on their return to work. In most cases, the RTW Co-ordinator will be required to communicate with key parties by:

- ▄ meeting regularly with involved parties, including the Primary Treating Medical Practitioner to provide updates and to discuss the progress of the injured worker
- ▄ liaising with the Injury Management Co-ordinator about the need for an Workplace Rehabilitation Provider
- ▄ providing information on and explaining the injury management and return to work process to the injured worker
- ▄ maintaining regular contact with the injured worker and discussing any issues they may have and their suitability to return to work
- ▄ encouraging and fostering a good relationship and effective communication between the injured worker, the employer and insurer.



WHAT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DOES A RTW CO-ORDINATOR REQUIRE?

It would be expected that a RTW Co-ordinator would be someone with:

- /// expert knowledge of the workplace, including jobs, processes, people and management systems
- /// excellent written and verbal communication skills, including negotiation and interpersonal skills, and the ability to deal with conflict and confronting situations
- /// demonstrated ability to solve problems and make decisions
- /// well developed organisational and time management skills
- /// ability to manage and disseminate information effectively to all relevant parties
- /// knowledge of (or ability to acquire knowledge of) the Act and associated regulations and guidelines
- /// experience in (or the ability to acquire knowledge and skills in) injury management and return to work, including case and case load management skills
- /// ability to identify when workplace rehabilitation provider services are required.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD RTW CO-ORDINATOR?

A good RTW Co-ordinator is someone who:

- // has a genuine desire to be a RTW Co-ordinator
- // is respected and supported by both staff and managers
- // is familiar with and has access to all areas of the workplace
- // has (or is able to develop) rapport with workers and whose advice is generally sought after and well regarded
- // can be sensitive and empathetic to workers' needs
- // is trustworthy and can be relied upon to maintain confidentiality at all times
- // is proactive in their approach to work
- // is objective and can weigh up the needs of both the worker and the workplace
- // has sufficient authority to make decisions and to ensure activities detailed in return to work plans and injury management plans are followed
- // has the ability to recognise when they require assistance or do not have the necessary knowledge to achieve an outcome; for example seeking assistance from an Injury Management Co-ordinator.

APPOINTING A RTW CO-ORDINATOR

In most workplaces, the person appointed to the role of a RTW Co-ordinator will be an existing worker and the RTW Co-ordinator's role will form part of, and complement, their existing duties.

Although not essential, the duties of a RTW Co-ordinator indicate that someone *not* in a direct management role would be better placed to perform the role. This ensures that the RTW co-ordinator is seen as independent of management.

Having another worker perform the duties of a RTW Co-ordinator also has the benefit of helping others in the workplace understand the issues surrounding workplace injuries and returning injured workers back to work.

HOW MANY RTW CO-ORDINATORS SHOULD BE APPOINTED?

The number of RTW Co-ordinators appointed is at the discretion of the employer. Factors to consider may include:

- // case load
- // number and remoteness of worksites
- // cover for RTW Co-ordinators during absences.

CAN THE ROLE OF RTW CO-ORDINATOR BE OUTSOURCED?

The intent of the Act is for a RTW Co-ordinator to be workplace based. While this does not preclude the role from being outsourced, it is strongly recommended that an in-house co-ordinator is appointed as in most cases they will have well-established working relationships with workers as well as a good understanding of all facets of the workplace.

WHAT TRAINING DOES AN INDIVIDUAL NEED TO BECOME A RTW CO-ORDINATOR?

While the WorkCover Tasmania Board has not approved a course of training for RTW Co-ordinators, it is recognised that this role requires certain knowledge and skills to enable the appointed person to effectively perform the role.

For this reason, it is highly recommended that a RTW Co-ordinator completes the following three units of competencies recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework:

FNSWCMP 303A	Work within the workers compensation industry sector
FNSWCMP 502A	Develop return to work strategies
BSBFLM 503B	Manage effective workplace relationships

Completing these units not only provides individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively fulfil the role of a RTW Co-ordinator, but also may be used as recognition towards completion of the Injury Management Co-ordinator qualification.


There are a number of registered training organisations available to deliver this training. For further information, including contact details, call WorkCover Tasmania on 1300 776 572.

HOW DOES THE ROLE OF THE RTW CO-ORDINATOR RELATE TO THE INJURY MANAGEMENT CO-ORDINATOR AND THE WORKPLACE REHABILITATION PROVIDER?

As represented in the diagram below, the roles of the RTW Co-ordinator, the Injury Management Co-ordinator and the Workplace Rehabilitation Provider are separate and they perform different functions.

However, they all play a pivotal role in the injury management and return to work process, and complement each other through their collaboration and their commitment to returning the injured worker to early, safe and sustainable return to work.





Depending on the needs of the workplace and provided the individual is suitably qualified, it may be deemed appropriate for an individual to undertake more than one of these roles. For instance, where an Injury Management Co-ordinator is workplace-based, it would be expected that they would also perform the role of the RTW Co-ordinator.

Alternatively, where the Injury Management Co-ordinator is insurer-based, it is possible for a RTW Co-ordinator to perform some functions of the Injury Management Co-ordinator, provided that lines of communication and accountability are clearly established.

It would be expected that the Injury Management Co-ordinator would provide the RTW Co-ordinator with written information setting out the RTW Co-ordinator's role and responsibilities; however, the Injury Management Co-ordinator would remain accountable for the functions of their role as defined in legislation.

Functions of the Injury Management Co-ordinator

An Injury Management Co-ordinator is a person appointed by the insurer or employer. An Injury Management Co-ordinator ensures the injury management process runs smoothly by co-ordinating and planning the injury management process.

This is achieved by ensuring that:

- ▀ contact is made with the worker, the employer and the worker's primary treating medical practitioner, as soon practicable after the worker is assigned
- ▀ injury management plans and return to work plans for the worker are developed, reviewed, modified and implemented, as agreed with the worker or determined by the Tribunal and in consultation with key parties
- ▀ the work capacity of the worker is regularly reviewed and options for the worker's retraining or redeployment are investigated and arranged
- ▀ if required, workplace rehabilitation providers are appointed
- ▀ the following people are involved in managing the worker's injury and return to work:
 - the worker, the worker's employer and the employer's insurer
 - the primary treating medical practitioner and other treating medical practitioners
- ▀ the following people are, if necessary or desirable, involved in managing the worker's injury:
 - workplace rehabilitation providers
 - the Return to Work Co-ordinator
 - supervisors and line managers
 - allied health professionals

- // medical information is collated
- // relevant documentation is maintained
- // attempts are made to resolve any disputes
- // information on injury management is provided to the worker and the worker's employer.

For more information, get your free copy of *The Role of the Injury Management Co-ordinator*. See *Further Resources* on page 12 for details.

Services provided by a Workplace Rehabilitation Provider

A Workplace Rehabilitation Provider is an organisation that provides prompt and necessary professional rehabilitation services to Injured workers, particularly in more complex and difficult cases to injured workers.

A Workplace Rehabilitation Provider must be accredited by the WorkCover Tasmania Board in order to provide the following services:

- // initial workplace rehabilitation assessment
- // assessment of the functional capacity of a worker
- // workplace assessment
- // job analysis
- // advice concerning job modification
- // rehabilitation counselling
- // vocational assessment
- // advice or assistance in relation to job seeking
- // advice or assistance in arranging vocational re-education or retraining
- // any other service that is prescribed by the regulations.

For more information, get your free copy of *The Role of the Workplace Rehabilitation Provider*. See *Further Resources* on page 12 for details.



FURTHER RESOURCES

There are other publications available from WorkCover that help explain the processes and people involved:

- *A Guide to Workers Compensation in Tasmania* GB112
- *Guideline for Developing Return to Work Plans and Injury Management Plans* (internet only)
- *Guideline for Employer Injury Management Policy* (internet only)
- *Injury Management: Making it Work* GB197
- *Injury Management: Making it Work* poster
- *The Role of the Injury Management Co-ordinator* GB194
- *The Role of the Primary Treating Medical Practitioner* (GB257)
- *The Role of the Workplace Rehabilitation Provider* GB256.

For your free copies of any of these and other useful guidance material, go to www.workcover.tas.gov.au and search for the code numbers listed above. Alternatively, call WorkCover Tasmania on 1300 776 572.

If you are an employer, your insurer will also be able to help you.

1300 776 572 www.workcover.tas.gov.au

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