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KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH INJURED EMPLOYEES

Is This The Supervisors Responsibility?

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control

One of the goals of your company's safety program is to prevent injury accidents and to reduce or eliminate their associated costs. Typically, you the supervisors is responsible for administering the safety program at the operational level. Examples of your responsibilities may include holding regular safety meetings, enforcing safety rules and procedures, conducting periodic safety inspections, correcting unsafe acts and directing unsafe conditions to be fixed. Unfortunately, the faithful completion of these elements will not guarantee that accidents will be entirely eliminated from the operation. Injuries may continue to occur despite efforts to prevent them. When an employee is injured at work, you usually have responsibility to investigate the accident--to determine what happened, how it happened, and why it happened. You must also take action that will prevent recurrence of a similar incident.

But, should a supervisor's responsibilities in the injury management process stop with accident investigations and corrective action? Many supervisors and management representatives would answer yes. However, what about keeping in contact with the injured employee while he or she is away from work receiving time loss benefits? Traditionally, the majority of the post-injury contact with the injured employee has been the responsibility of the SeaBright Insurance Claims Examiner. But to help reduce associated injury costs and to return injured employees to work as quickly as possible, supervisors should take an active role in the injury management process. This means maintaining frequent contact with crew members while they are recovering and not on the job.

Your participation may allow the injured employee to get back to work sooner than would be possible without your involvement.

The Benefits Of Personal Contact:

Here are five reasons why direct contact from you, the supervisor, benefits the claims management process:

1. Builds Employee Loyalty: Your focus should be on making sure that ill or injured employees understand that you and the company care about them. Let the person know that they are missed at work and you are looking forward to their recovery and return to productive work. This helps build employee loyalty and the feeling they are needed at work.

2. Reduces Fear: You can help explain, in basic terms, the workers' compensation benefits that the injured employee will receive. If necessary, your SeaBright Insurance Claims Examiner can provide information regarding specific benefits due the employee. An environment of goodwill and trust is an important element in a successful claims management program. If you have a good relationship with the injured employee, hearing a brief benefits explanation directly from you will help reduce the fear of lost wages, and the financial crisis this might mean.

3. Improves Understanding: You have the advantage of knowing the injured employee better than the claims examiner because you already have a working relationship with the employee. You know the most about the employee's behavior and attitude before the injury and you can utilize this insight in making an assessment of his or her general attitude after the injury. It is important to determine whether or not your crew member seems genuinely interested in returning to work for the company, as this can effect the recovery process and how the claim is managed.

4. Speeds the Return to Work: You have the advantage of knowing the injured employee's job duties better than the claims examiner. Your understanding of the work, places you in the best position to discuss how specific job duties can be temporarily modified to meet current limitations. Your participation may allow the injured employee to get back to work sooner than would be possible without your involvement.

5. Helps Prevent Disputes and Litigation: Lastly, when work-related injury or illness involves extended time loss from work, your personal contact could help curb any potential resentment that may develop between your company's top management and the injured employee. If contact is not maintained, there can be a tendency for the injured employee to feel the company really doesn't care what happens to him or her. There is also a tendency for management to believe the injured employee is malingering and is abusing the system. You can bridge these misunderstandings.

Let the person know that they are missed at work and you are looking forward to their recovery and return to productive work.

How To Keep In Touch:

Mail or Email: Your contact can take several different forms. One is to mail a "get well" card to the injured employee's home. Another nice touch is to have the card signed by a group of co-workers. In the case of a serious injury requiring hospitalization, flowers or reading materials can be sent to the injured employee's hospital room. For injuries requiring extended hospitalization, personal visits to the hospital room might be appropriate.

Telephone Contact: Phone contact is probably the most convenient method of keeping in touch with injured employees. You should make a phone call at least every 7 to 14 days. Typical lead questions to begin your phone conversations are:

.....How are you doing?

.....How are your treatment and rehab going?

.....Are you getting any better?

.....Will you be returning to work soon?

.....Is the claims examiner treating you fairly, are you getting your time loss benefits on time?

Talk about current activities at work, so the absent crew member will still feel part of the team. You can also discuss interesting matters pertaining to co-workers on the job. Let the injured employee know how much you value his or her contribution and how you are looking forward to their return. If applicable, you may even want to discuss possible temporary modified duty. Perhaps you can agree on the basic issues that must be resolved in order for an early return to occur, such as acquiring a doctor's release.

Make This an Important Part of Your Role

By keeping in touch you will demonstrate to injured employees that you and your company still care about them. Your contacts should also help keep the injured employee thinking about getting back on the job. Prompt injury recovery and return to work are beneficial to you, your crew, your company, and the injured employee. Your participation and involvement in the injury management process are invaluable. **Make the effort. It's worth it!**

