

# For the Employer: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – Gradual Return to Work

## **Who decides what the gradual return to work plan looks like?**

The doctor and/or other medical practitioner (such as a physiotherapist) will determine the return to work plan according to the employee's level of recovery and readiness to do tasks associated with the employee's usual work and schedule. The employer has the final say as to whether the plan proposed works in the current work environment. Prior to the start of the gradual return is where the employer has the most input for the plan to ensure it will work in your environment.

## **Do I have to support the plan as developed?**

Once the plan has been developed and approved by WSBC, the physician, and the employer, then yes, the plan needs to be supported.

## **What if I have other employees in that department doing a gradual return to work already?**

It is understood that there can be a temporary saturation point for gradual returns. It is important to talk with the worker's case manager at WorkSafeBC about this situation. The start of a gradual return to work can be delayed if necessary.

## **What if the gradual return to work plan proposed is longer than the employer can support?**

The usual time frame for a gradual return is 2-6 weeks. If the proposed plan is longer than the employer is able to support, then it will be important to discuss with the worker's case manager at WorkSafeBC the length of gradual return to work you can support. For example, if the proposed plan is 6 weeks and you have certain factors (supervisor going on vacation, end of seasonal work, another GRTW starting) that would limit the plan to 4 weeks, then a conversation with WorkSafeBC about possibly having the employee continue in rehab activities outside of work until he/she can be successful with a shorter GRTW plan is recommended.

## **What if the employee starts the gradual return to work and then advises the employer that they are not doing well?**

Close monitoring of the worker on a gradual return to work is important. If the employee is not able to tolerate either the hours established or the tasks assigned, have the worker visit his/her physician for reassessment of injury status and associated return to work plan. Ensure the WorkSafeBC case manager is aware of any challenges with the return to work plan.

## **What if the gradual return to work plan is only provided by the doctor week by week?**

A complete gradual return to work from start to anticipated end provides the worker with a goal to work towards and a date for the employer to expect the worker back to his/her usual job and schedule. Gradual return to work plans provided in weekly pieces can be hard to manage. Speak with the worker and request he/she ask the doctor provide a full plan from start to finish. If no success with this approach, speak with the WorkSafeBC case manager about the plan and associated timeline.

## **What if the employee asks for vacation in the middle of the gradual return to work?**

Did the employee have pre-planned vacation and associated plans that cannot be changed (for example, plane tickets and accommodations booked)? If so, the vacation can be granted as is but it will be important to advise WorkSafeBC of these plans. The employee would then collect vacation pay for the time and the claim with WorkSafeBC would be interrupted/suspended for the duration of vacation. Upon return from vacation it will be important for the worker to see his/her physician for an assessment of readiness to either resume working full time and duty or to resume the gradual return to work.

If there were no previous plans/booking of vacation, then it is at the employer's discretion whether to grant vacation or not. Keep in mind, interrupting a worker's rehabilitation and return to work can negatively impact the momentum and delay the full time/duty return to work.

## **When in doubt?**

Call the WorkSafeBC case manager to discuss your concerns.