

Return-to-Work Assistance for Small Employers

Program Offers Small Employers Assistance in Returning Injured Employees to Work

The performance of a small business employee can directly affect the profitability of their employer. When an employee has a work-related injury or illness, employers benefit if the employee is able to continue working or return to work as soon as it is medically appropriate. However, many small employers cannot afford the workplace modifications that may be needed for an injured employee to continue working.

The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Worker's Compensation (TDI-DWC) can reimburse small employers for expenses incurred for workplace modifications, including special equipment, tools, furniture or devices, or other associated costs which can allow an injured employee to stay at work or return to work. A small employer with workers' compensation insurance coverage and 2 to 50 employees may be eligible to receive reimbursement up to \$2,500 for qualified expenses. The program also allows for guaranteed repayment of expenses associated with workplace modifications that have been preauthorized by TDI-DWC.

A return-to-work pilot project for small employers was created by the Legislature in 2005; earlier this year, lawmakers approved legislation to allow the Commissioner of Workers' Compensation to preauthorize reimbursements to employers participating in the pilot project.

"Returning injured employees to the workplace when they are medically able is a main goal of the Texas workers' compensation system. The pilot program will benefit small employers and injured employees in Texas by assisting them in their efforts to achieve this outcome," said Albert Betts, Commissioner of the Workers' Compensation.

To apply for the reimbursement, a small employer must submit an Application for Reimbursement from the Return-To-Work Account for Small Employers (DWC Form-008) to TDI-DWC. The form is available for download from the TDI-DWC website at <http://www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/rtw/index.html>. For more infor-

mation on the Return to Work Reimbursement Program for Small Employers, contact TDI-DWC Return-to-Work Services by calling 512-804-5000 or e-mailing rtw.services@tdi.state.tx.us.

TDI-DWC also offers workplace safety resources for small employers through the OSHCON (Occupational Safety and Health Consultation Program) program, regional training seminars, free video loans, free safety and health publications and more. For more information on these workplace safety resources visit the TDI-DWC website at <http://www.tdi.state.tx.us/wc/safety/index.html>.

Stress: \$200 Billion Problem

Headaches, irritability, loss of focus, back pain, indigestion and weight problems are all symptoms of stress in your life! Job stress in the U.S. costs \$200 billion annually in terms of illness and injury. Stress is the number one problem for those who are juggling responsibilities at work, and at home. Stress can cause physical and mental health problems such as headaches, stomach pains, neck and shoulder pains, weight gain, fatigue and depression, as well as, lead to life-threatening diseases if unaddressed. It can also increase the potential for safety hazards in the workplace and violence.

How should you handle stress at work? If your job requires a lot of sitting, you should take a five-minute break every hour to move your body. Standing and swinging your shoulder improves circulation. Rolling and shrugging your shoulders releases tension. Leaning forward in your chair and letting your arms dangle relieves tension.

If your job requires a lot walking or standing, taking some time to breathe deeply will help to re-energize you and ease feelings of fatigue. A short walk, or any kind of moderate exercise, can help reduce stress and is also highly beneficial to your health.

So keep moving, breathing deeply and smiling - stress reduction is in your hands.

Forward To Conduct Testing For Texas Health Resources

Forward Edge is pleased to announce that it will conduct drug testing management services for Harris Methodist Hospitals and the Texas Health Resources. Texas Health Resources is one of the largest faith-based, nonprofit health care delivery systems in the United States. The system serves more than 6.3 million people living in 16 counties in north central Texas. In 2003, more than one in five area residents receiving in-patient care sought treatment at a THR hospital. THR was formed in 1997 with the assets of Fort Worth-based Harris Methodist Health System and Dallas-based Presbyterian Healthcare Resources. Later that year, Arlington Memorial Hospital joined the THR system. THR has 13 hospitals with more than 3,300 licensed hospital beds, employs more than 18,250 people and counts more than 3,700 physicians with active staff privileges at its hospitals.

Harris Methodist Hospitals is committed to the mission of improving the health of the people in the communities we serve. Located in Tarrant, Johnson and Erath counties, Harris Methodist Hospitals serve thousands of residents in Fort Worth and the surrounding areas.

Question of the Month Drug and Alcohol Testing Industry Association

Question:

If a C/TPA is hired as an "independent safety consultant" that executes all aspects of the employer's safety and drug and alcohol testing programs, can the C/TPA act as a DER?

Answer:

Service agents are prohibited from acting as DERs under any circumstances. The fact that an organization that is called an "independent safety consultant" acts as a consultant to an employer for purposes of executing a drug and alcohol testing or safety program does not make it any less a service agent. It is still prohibited from acting as a DER. (DOT Q & A)