

TIPS FOR MANAGING A RETURN TO WORK FOR AN INJURED WORKER

SAFETY

Ingrid Pagura,
Industry Development Coordinator, AGWA

Having a worker who has been off on leave due to an injury or illness can be stressful for everyone involved. Having that worker return to work can also be stressful for everyone involved. Your injured worker doesn't need to be fully recovered or finished their medical treatment for them to return to work. Often complete recovery doesn't happen until they are back at work. Generally, returning to work post-injury isn't always easy but long-term absences from work have negative health impacts, including the reduced likelihood of ever returning to work.

Returning to work has benefits for all involved. For injured workers returning to work can:

- Enhance the recovery process
- Increase social participation and confidence
- Decrease the physical, psychological, social and economic effects of being absent from work.

For employers, playing an active role in the return to work can:

- Help your worker recover faster
- Keep the skills and knowledge of the worker in the business
- Reduce costs associated with finding and training new staff
- Build morale within the workplace.

A gradual return to work can help as it can help minimise the risk of being injured again or making the original injury worse. As an

employer you are required to provide modified or gradual return to work options

This is a complex situation and varies from person to person, however a successful return to work is more likely if done gradually. Often, even starting these conversations can be daunting.

Safe Work Australia has put together a guide for supervisors in small and medium businesses to help with this. It is called *Managing the Relationship with an Injured or Ill Worker During Return to Work*.

This Guide covers the process from the injury to the return to work, including conversation starters. That first step is often the hardest. It includes suggestions as to what to include in conversations, checklists and even how to talk to the rest of the team. It is really an invaluable tool that can help take the awkwardness out of a difficult situation.

If you would like a copy of the Guide, please see safeworkaustralia.gov.au or contact AGWA at training@agwa.com.au.

2023 AGWA SAFETY AWARD FINALISTS

It is with great pleasure that I announce that the 2023 AGWA Safety Award finalists are:

1. Lucidity Rollout by Glass Co Metro (WA)

The system provides a 'single source of truth' and clear visibility as well as integrated and automated reporting including safety goal tracking, task completion status on actions from audits or inspections, and incident management. It gets rid of the standard paper types of systems used traditionally by businesses of our size and makes reporting easier. We would be able to demonstrate due diligence and sound record keeping should a serious incident occur.

2. Heavy Lifting Safety Solution by Festival Glass (SA)

This Festival Glass & Glazing safety improvement program identified the need to eliminate soft tissue and back injuries by investigating and then implementing factory and onsite mobile mechanical lifting equipment, to ensure a safer and more productive workplace. This fundamental program has been an exciting and valuable WHS benefit to our team now and into the future, and our team continue

to see the benefits by working and staying safe. We believe that the results speak for themselves – the complete elimination of all soft tissue injuries in the 3 years since the implementation of the solution is an award-winning achievement for our team and an outstanding example of continuous WHS improvement that can benefit the glazing industry.

3. No Injury November by AGG (NSW)

The AGG NSW 'No Injury November' initiative was designed to find practical ways to have safety 'top of mind' during the busiest time of the year. A heavy focus in one month with activities, prizes, training and guest speakers and designed to kick start a more intense focus on safety that continues throughout the year. Also hoping it can be embraced by other companies to improve the safety of all industry participants.

Engagement was pleasantly encompassing with all team members being active and contributing. We continue to witness validated effectiveness as it is still referred to today (5 months later) and we are especially proud of the team.

4. Partnership with University of SA to host final-year Physiotherapy students by Aussie Aluminium (SA)

The work performed to manufacture aluminium windows and doors is very labour intensive, with an ageing experienced workforce, combined with architects designing bigger and bigger doors and windows the importance of working safely is now at the forefront of our core responsibility as an employer. The partnership between Aussie Aluminium and the University of South Australia has enabled business owners, Davis and Tiffany Perin to implement and provide their staff with a much safer, compliant workplace for their employees. The reports presented by the students have assisted in the strategic planning for preventing workplace injuries and many of the recommendations given have been implemented. We currently have students researching an industry-specific manual handling training package that we will use as part of our staff training.