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|  ALTERNATIVE / LIMITED DUTY JOBS | NO.  |
| **Meeting Objectives**To explain the purpose and use of alternative duty jobs. The result should be greater understanding of the value of such jobs and greater cooperation from works in developing and using alternate duty jobs to help injured workers ease back into work, build strength, and prevent further injury.**Suggested Materials to Have on Hand**Prepared samples of types of alternate duty jobs for the department.**Introduction / Overview**Despite our best efforts, people are sometimes injured on the job. And even when an injury isn’t life-threatening or permanent disabling, it may make it difficult or impossible for a person to perform their regular job.If, for instance, you hurt your back while lifting, it will probably be a while before you can safely perform work that puts any strain on your back. A machine operator with a hand injury won’t be able to operate a machine while that hand heals.Sometimes more than time is needed for an injury to heal. Many workers may need a carefully designed and supervised rehabilitation program to help restore the injured body part – or even the whole body – to its former capabilities. Rehabilitation may involve physical therapy and special exercises to harden the muscles and strengthen body parts.But just because one part of your body is injured doesn’t necessarily mean that your entire body and brain have stopped functioning. As part of the recovery and strengthening process, an injured worker’s physician or physical therapist may also recommend that the worker be assigned to what is called an alternate duty job.Alternate duty jobs – which are sometimes called light duty jobs or early return to work – can play an important role in rebuilding and strengthening the body. And these jobs can have other benefits as well. The may provide injured workers with:* An opportunity to make a productive contribution while they heal.
* Greater earnings than are available from workers’ comp.
* A way to keep from getting bored or worrying that they’ll never get back to normal.
* A gradual return to work and rebuilding of the body that can actually speed recovery.

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| Alternate duty jobs have benefits from the company’s point of view, too. They help us to keep functioning at full capacity, without losing the contributions of experienced, valuable employees. Alternate duty jobs also help reduce company workers’ comp costs, which mean there’s more money available for more productive purposes.Alternate duty jobs, which are developed and monitored with the close involvement of medical and rehabilitation experts, are a win-win approach for everyone. That’s why we’re going to explain them in some detail today.**General Hazards**I’ve just explained some of the key reasons why alternate duty jobs are becoming increasingly popular. Yet they’re often misunderstood – and resisted – by both the employees assigned to them and by their co-workers.Sometimes injured workers are hesitant to work at alternate jobs because they think they’re being treated as invalids and they’re worried they’ll never get back to their old level of achievement. Or they may be reluctant to take on any kind of work for fear that it will aggravate their problem or lead to another injury.Actually, alternate duty work is designed to prevent these problems. An alternate duty job is carefully designed by medical professionals to match the worker’s capabilities at that time. The job may, depending on the injury, be structured to help the work build strength and gradually do more. Sometimes, as the injury heals and strength increases, the alternate duty job may be modified or changed to allow the worker to use their increased capabilities and continue to speed recovery.An injured person’s co-workers are sometimes suspicious of alternate duty jobs, too. They may feel that the person isn’t pulling their own weight and doing a job of value. Sometimes there’s a concern that a person is faking an injury to get out of doing real work.But alternate duty jobs are real jobs that enable a worker who can’t do their regular job to still do work that needs to be done. And, since there’s medical consultation on these jobs, you know that there’s a real injury that has been professionally treated and evaluated. |
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| **Protection Again Hazards**Let’s look more closely at what an alternate duty job is and isn’t, and how an alternate duty program works.First, here’s what alternate duty is not. It’s not:* Make-work
* An excuse or opportunity to goof off
* A job that risks re-injuring a worker

Here are some characteristics of a good alternate duty program:* It’s designed and monitored by medical and/or rehabilitation professionals to help an injured worker recover and get back to work quickly and safely. The professionals identify what activities could cause the injured person problems and set limits, such as “no lifting over 10 pounds” or “no sitting for more than 15 minutes without walking around”. These professionals usually monitor the worker regularly to make sure the person isn’t having any problems and that healing is progressing.
* An alternate duty job is real work that needs doing, but doesn’t strain an injured body part or put an injured worker at risk.
* An alternate duty job is temporary. In other words, it lasts only long enough to enable the person to become strong and healthy enough to go back to their regular job.
* An alternate duty job helps prevent future injuries. During this break from regular tasks, the worker, their supervisor, and other interested parties can work together to determine what caused the injury and how to prevent it in the future. That may mean new or additional safety training, redesigning a job, task, or work area, or other approaches to reducing the injury risk – for that worker and for the rest of the staff.

**Safety Procedures**(Note to Supervisor: The following section discusses different types of jobs that lend themselves to alternate duty. If your company or your department has developed specific alternate duty jobs, you may want to discuss them here.)Alternate duty jobs are supervised by medical professionals and/or by physical therapists. Often, the people assigned to these jobs have undergone physical therapy. They may take part in physical therapy while working part-time at an alternate duty job. Sometimes, however, what’s really needed is time for the injury to heal by itself. But during that time, the injured person has to avoid aggravating the injury – in other words, that person needs a less strenuous alternate duty job. |
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| Alternate duty jobs are real work, not just work that could cause physical problems for the injured person. There are many types of jobs that need doing that could fall into this category. For example:* Sorting parts
* Organizing stock
* Inspecting products
* Reworking products
* Updating records
* Handling customer or vendor questions and problems

Sometimes alternate duty jobs are simply less strenuous tasks that are usually performed by another worker. By assigning the recovering worker to this less strenuous job, we free up the person who normally does it to take on a special project or begin to learn something new.In some cases, a worker on alternate duty may do their regular job but at a slower pace. Or, the injured worker may be assigned to their normal job in partnership with someone else. In these instances, the recovering worker will handle the less strenuous parts of a task while the second person is responsible for those aspects of the job that the recovering worker isn’t yet able to do.An important part of alternate duty jobs is they give us a chance to redesign jobs to prevent future injuries. Sometimes that means a person on alternate duty does their normal job but in a new way.A person with back problems who normally does their job while standing may switch to working in a seated position or may add frequent short breaks to take a walk.A machine may be readjusted so that it’s at a more comfortable height that removes the need for awkward stretching or bending.A job that involves many repetitive motions may be redesigned so that the person periodically switches to different tasks in order to prevent pain from using the same motion over and over again for too long a time. |
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| One of the most important things to remember about alternative duty jobs is that we don’t just assign them and leave it at that. Medical and rehabilitation professionals keep close tabs on the recovering worker to make sure there are no problems and that the person is, in fact, getting stronger and healthier. As the worker gets better, these professionals may, over time, suggest gradually adding more difficult or strenuous tasks. At some point, they will usually determine that the person is well enough to do their regular work and help develop a schedule for easing back into the normal job.There are situations, of course, when a person can’t ever go back to doing their old job – at least not in the same way. Some injuries, such as loss of a body part, may make that impossible.In other situations, such as back problems or repetitive motion problems, the person can’t do the job in exactly the way they did before. When that’s the case, the problem can often be solved by redesigning the job. The modifications we talked about that prevent future injuries may also make it possible for a person who has been injured to perform the job safely.If a job can’t be redesigned to allow a person to perform it safely, we will make efforts to find a comparable job elsewhere in the company. That may mean moving to a job in another department or may require some kind of retraining. But we will employ tactics to provide a job for workers who are willing and able to work and contribute.**Suggested Discussion Questions**:1. What is the purpose of an alternate duty job?
2. What are examples of circumstances in which we would assign someone to an alternate duty job?
3. Who gets involved in developing and setting limits on alternate duty jobs?
4. What are some of the characteristics of alternate duty jobs?
5. What are the benefits of alternate duty jobs to injured workers and to the company?
6. What are some examples of potential alternate duty jobs?
7. How can alternate duty jobs benefit workers who haven’t been injured?
8. What are some examples of how we might redesign jobs to prevent further injuries?
9. What are the options when a worker can’t ever return to doing exactly what he or she did before?
10. Are there any other questions?
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| **Wrap-up**We hope to avoid being injured on the job. And if we are hurt, we hope to recover quickly and fully, with little or no loss of income. Alternate duty jobs help to promote fast, safe recovery under the supervision of trained medical and rehabilitation professionals. They also allow injured workers to continue to earn money and contribute their experience and expertise as productive members of our team.Alternate duty jobs also help us to have a safer, healthier workplace. They give us an opportunity to explore what kinds of tasks tend to lead to injuries and to redesign work in ways that help the injured and healthy worker to avoid injuries.I’m sure you now recognize that alternate duty jobs are a practical and cost-effective way to reduce injuries and re-injuries and to help those who are injured to regain their capabilities in a safe and gradual way. Keep what we’ve discussed today in mind when there is a need to provide alternate duty jobs in our department. As you now know, that approach will help anyone who is injured to recover and help all of us to work safely.**Sample Handout Attached** |
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Sample Handout

**Alternative Duty Jobs**

**Alternative Duty Jobs Are:**

* An important part of an injured worker’s rehabilitation and recovery program.
* Carefully designed and supervised by medical and rehabilitation professionals to promote gradual healing and strengthening.
* A way for workers to be productive and earn money while healing.
* A means of relieving boredom and concerns about healing while a worker is recovering from injury.
* A way for the company to retain the contributions of experienced, valuable employees who have been injured.
* A factor in keeping workers compensation costs down, freeing company funds for other uses.
* Real jobs that contribute to departmental and company productivity.
* Temporary jobs that last only as long as it takes for an injured worker to recover.
* Jobs that involve tasks that limit physical strain, such as sorting parts, inspecting products, updating records, etc.
* Sometimes modified and toughened by supervising medical and rehabilitation professionals as recovery progresses.
* A valuable opportunity to modify or redesign jobs to reduce the chance that anyone will be injured in the future.