



# AMERICAN SUBCONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION HOUSTON CHAPTER

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## ACCESSING SAFETY KNOWLEDGE (ASK) SHEET: RETURN TO WORK

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Imagine you're having a great day at work. Everything is on schedule and moving along smoothly. It's been very quite all day and suddenly, the phone rings and the voice on the other end is your foreman letting you know that one of your employees has just been injured on the job. Obviously, your first reaction is one of curiosity and concern for your employee. Who's hurt? How bad is the injury? How did it happen? How are going to take care of him/her? Is he/she going to be OK?

Once the dust clears and you have taken care of your employee, you will then begin to question the business ramifications of what has just happened. How much is injury going to cost? How will this affect my incident rate? What am I going to tell the GC? What about my EMR and insurance premiums?

We all do everything we can to prevent accidents, but the reality is we all face hazards in the construction business every day. Safety training, providing personal protection equipment and creating a safe work environment are all keys to preventing accidents. However, we should always be prepared to handle an incident if one does occur.

A job injury can result in anything from a onetime first aid treatment, to an injury that requires a relatively short healing period, to one that requires a long time rehabilitation, or even worse. Long before you are faced with an injury to one of your employees, you should be prepared to manage any scenario that may result. What are you going to do if the doctor gives your employee restrictions to return to work? What if employee is going to be on restrictions for a long period of time?

If an injured employee returns from the doctor's office and is released to work with restrictions, you have a decision to make. You may say to your employee – *“Well, that's what I have insurance for. I'll just let the insurance company handle this and call me when you're released to come back to work.”* If you do not offer your employee work, please understand the consequences. First of all, your employee probably really wants to continue working. He/she still needs their income and still has a family to support. They will most certainly feel abandoned and unimportant. They may even experience a great deal of resentment. In addition, you have just taken an OSHA recordable incident and turned it into a 'lost time' incident.

Something you should consider, if you don't already have one in place, is implementing a 'Return to Work' policy if you have an employee return from the doctor with restrictions. Studies have shown that an individual's mindset is very important in his/her rehabilitation process. If you offer your employee an assignment, at their regular rate of pay, that meets their physical restrictions, positive things happen. First and foremost, you show your employee that you really care about what happened to them. Second, you keep a familiar atmosphere and routine for your employee with the same financial security he/she had prior to being injured. You prevent him/her from sitting at home and developing a sense of worthlessness, futility, depression and resentment. Remember, your employee was a proud member of your team before the injury. They need to feel the same way during their rehabilitation