

— FOR COLORADO EMPLOYERS

# The Employer's Modified- Duty Guide

How to keep injured workers working, recovering, and off the sidelines — within their restrictions.



# An injured worker at home costs more than an injured worker at work.

When an injury takes someone off the job completely, three things start to happen. Wage-replacement benefits begin. The worker loses the routine, the team, and the sense of purpose that work provides. And every week away makes it harder to come back.

Modified duty — temporary work that fits within a physician's restrictions — interrupts all three. The worker stays connected, stays paid by you instead of by the claim, and recovers in an environment that keeps them moving.



## Three reasons it works

1

### Lower claim costs.

When an employee works modified duty at full wages, temporary disability benefits generally stop. At reduced wages, only partial benefits are owed.

2

### Faster recovery.

Appropriate activity supports healing. Extended time away tends to slow return to full duty.

3

### Better retention.

Workers who stay connected are more likely to come back and stay.

**“The goal isn’t to rush anyone back. It’s to keep them in the game while they heal.”**

## Four things employers get wrong



### MYTH 1

~~“We don’t have any  
light work.”~~

### FACT

Almost every operation does — it just isn’t written down yet. Inventory counts, safety walk-throughs, training new hires, tool-crib staffing, paperwork, quality checks, and phone work all count. Page 5 shows you how to build a list.

### MYTH 2

~~“Modified duty keeps the  
injury off our OSHA log.”~~

### FACT

It doesn’t. A case involving restricted work or job transfer is still recordable and is counted as a restricted-work case. What modified duty can reduce is days away from work — and the claim costs that come with them.

### MYTH 3

~~“They have to be 100%  
before they come back.”~~

### FACT

That standard keeps people home longer than medically necessary. Your treating physician defines what the worker can safely do now. Your job is to match work to that.

### MYTH 4

~~“If they turn down  
modified duty, there’s  
nothing we can do.”~~

### FACT

In Colorado, a properly made written offer can affect temporary disability benefits if the worker refuses without a valid reason. The process matters — see page 7.

# Read the restrictions before you build the job

After every visit, the authorized treating physician documents the worker's status and restrictions on the Physician's Report of Workers' Compensation Injury (Form WC164). That form is your roadmap.

## Restrictions usually cover

- Lifting, carrying, pushing, and pulling limits (in pounds)
- Standing, walking, and sitting tolerances
- Use of one arm, hand, or leg
- Bending, twisting, kneeling, squatting, climbing
- Driving or operating equipment
- Hours per day or shifts per week



### TWO RULES SUPERVISORS FORGET

1

**Restrictions apply 24/7.** Not just at work. A 20-lb limit doesn't end at clock-out.

2

**Restrictions change.** Expect updates after each visit. Assign work for the restrictions on the latest form, not last week's.



**ICA note.** ICA sends updated restrictions to employers electronically, the same day as every visit, so your supervisors are never working from an outdated form.

# Do this before anyone gets hurt

The worst time to figure out what light work exists is the morning after an injury. A job bank is a short, pre-built list of real tasks sorted by physical demand. When restrictions arrive, you match — you don't scramble.

- 1 Walk each department.** Ask supervisors: what never gets done because no one has time?
- 2 List the task and its demands.** Lifting weight, posture, hands needed, standing/sitting time.
- 3 Sort by restriction type.** Seated only · No lifting over 10 lb · One-handed · **No ladders or heights** · Limited hours.
- 4 Assign an owner.** Who supervises each task?
- 5 Share it with your clinic.** Physicians can approve tasks faster when they know what's available.



**NO LADDERS OR HEIGHTS**

## Starter ideas by category

### Seated

Safety-data-sheet audits, training-record updates, phone follow-ups, parts tagging, scheduling support

### Light standing / walking

Safety observations, inventory counts, site inspections, quality checks

### One-handed

Badge/check-in desk, document scanning, inspection sign-offs

### Teaching

Mentoring new hires, delivering toolbox talks, building job-hazard analyses

**Use the Job Bank Builder worksheet on page 10.**

# What to do after an injury, in order

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## Day of injury

*Start here →*

- ☐ Get the worker care. For emergencies, call 911.
- ☐ Send the worker to your designated provider for non-emergency injuries.
- ☐ Report the injury to your carrier or adjuster.
- ☐ Tell the worker modified duty is available and that you expect them back.

## Within 24 hours

- ☐ Get the restrictions form from the visit.
- ☐ Match restrictions to your job bank.
- ☐ Confirm the supervisor understands the restrictions.

## Within 72 hours

- ☐ Offer modified duty (verbally first; in writing if needed — page 7).
- ☐ Tell the adjuster whether the worker is on modified duty and at what wage.
- ☐ Schedule the first supervisor check-in.

**“The message the worker hears in the first conversation shapes the whole claim. Make it: we want you back, and here’s how.”**



**ICA note.** For new injuries, ICA provides free transportation from the job site to the clinic and back, so getting care quickly doesn’t depend on who can drive.

# Verbal is fast. Written is protective.

Colorado employers can offer modified duty at any time. There are two ways to do it.

| Verbal (informal) offer                          | Written (formal) offer                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fast and flexible                                | Structured and documented                                                                  |
| You offer work you believe fits the restrictions | The physician reviews and approves the specific tasks first                                |
| Start date by mutual agreement                   | Written offer on letterhead with duties, hours, wage, location, start date, and supervisor |
| <b>Best when the worker is eager to return</b>   | <b>Best when the worker hesitates or doesn't respond</b>                                   |

## The formal offer, step by step

- 1 Write a task list describing the modified duties.
- 2 Send it to the authorized treating physician for review and signature.
- 3 Prepare the written job offer on company letterhead, attaching the signed task list.
- 4 Deliver it in person with a signed receipt, or by both certified and regular mail.
- 5 Copy your adjuster.

### COLORADO RULE · WHEN A WORKER CAN REFUSE

Colorado law allows a worker on temporary disability to decline a modified-duty offer that requires a commute of more than 50 miles, or that requires driving when their treating physician has restricted driving. Build your offers around both.

**Use the Offer Checklist on page 11.**

# Modified duty works when someone owns it

Most modified-duty failures aren't refusals. They're assignments where the worker sits in a break room with nothing to do, or a supervisor quietly asks for "just one" lift outside the restrictions. Both send the same message: you're not really wanted here.

## Five habits

**1****Real work, not busywork.**

Meaningful tasks keep morale up and reduce no-shows.

**2****One accountable supervisor.**

Named, briefed, and given the restrictions in writing.

**3****Weekly check-ins.**

Five minutes: how's the pain, how's the work, any problems.

**4****Update after every visit.**

New restrictions mean a new assignment — up or down.

**5****Plan the step-up.**

As restrictions loosen, add hours and tasks so the return to full duty is gradual, not a cliff.

**COLORADO RULE · WAGES**

If modified duty pays less than the worker's pre-injury wage, partial benefits may cover part of the difference. Tell your adjuster the hours and wage as soon as the assignment starts.

## When does modified duty end?

When the physician releases the worker to full duty or places them at maximum medical improvement (MMI).

# A clinic built around getting people back to work

Modified duty only works if the medical side keeps pace. ICA is a physician-led occupational medicine practice — workers' compensation care is all we do.

## Level II accredited physicians

Our physicians are accredited by the Colorado Division of Workers' Compensation.

## Clear, specific restrictions

Written to be usable on the floor, updated after every visit.

## In-house physical therapy

Treatment and PT under one roof means fewer handoffs and faster progression.

## Free employee transportation

For new injuries — from the job site to the clinic and back.

## Task-list reviews

Send us your modified-duty task list and our physicians will review it against current restrictions the same day.

## Pinnacol SelectNet member

## LOCATIONS

### Denver

2490 W. 26th Ave., Bldg A,  
Ste 5

Denver, CO 80211

**(303) 531-4144**

### Thornton

9351 Grant Street, Ste  
600

Thornton, CO 80229

**(720) 531-8377**

### Parker

9397 Crown Crest Blvd.,  
Ste 100

Parker, CO 80138

**(720) 409-0007**

### Lakewood

7456 W. 5th Avenue, Ste  
100

Lakewood, CO 80226

**(720) 689-9655**

# Job Bank Builder

List real tasks now. When restrictions arrive, match them here.

Company \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

| Task | Department | Supervisor | Max lift (lb) | Sit / Stand / Mixed | Hands needed (1 or 2) | Heights or ladders (Y/N) | Driving (Y/N) | Hours available |
|------|------------|------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
|      |            |            |               |                     |                       |                          |               |                 |
|      |            |            |               |                     |                       |                          |               |                 |
|      |            |            |               |                     |                       |                          |               |                 |
|      |            |            |               |                     |                       |                          |               |                 |
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|      |            |            |               |                     |                       |                          |               |                 |
|      |            |            |               |                     |                       |                          |               |                 |
|      |            |            |               |                     |                       |                          |               |                 |

 Share this list with ICA so our physicians can approve tasks faster.

# Written Offer Checklist

Employee \_\_\_\_\_

|                          |                                                                                  |  |            |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Latest restrictions form attached                                                |  | Date _____ |
| <hr/>                    |                                                                                  |  |            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Task list written and sent to treating physician                                 |  |            |
| <hr/>                    |                                                                                  |  |            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Physician-signed task list received                                              |  |            |
| <hr/>                    |                                                                                  |  |            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Offer on letterhead lists: duties, hours, wage, location, start date, supervisor |  |            |
| <hr/>                    |                                                                                  |  |            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Commute is under 50 miles; no driving required if driving is restricted          |  |            |
| <hr/>                    |                                                                                  |  |            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Delivered by hand with signed receipt, OR certified + regular mail               |  |            |
| <hr/>                    |                                                                                  |  |            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Copy sent to adjuster                                                            |  | Date _____ |

## Supervisor Check-In Log

| Date | Current restrictions<br>from form dated<br>_____ | Tasks assigned | Worker feedback | Issues / follow-up | Initials |
|------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------|
|      |                                                  |                |                 |                    |          |
|      |                                                  |                |                 |                    |          |
|      |                                                  |                |                 |                    |          |
|      |                                                  |                |                 |                    |          |
|      |                                                  |                |                 |                    |          |
|      |                                                  |                |                 |                    |          |

# Ready to put this into practice?

Make ICA your designated provider and get a clinic that works with you on modified duty from the first visit.

**Schedule an Employer Consultation →**



**Denver • Thornton • Parker • Lakewood**



**Injury Care Associates**  
OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE

This guide provides general information for Colorado employers and is not legal advice. Workers' compensation rules change, and every claim is different. Consult your insurance carrier, claims adjuster, or legal counsel before acting on a specific case. Information current as of October 2026.