



# Ergonomics

Real People      Real Problems      Real Solutions

## ***MSD Management***

Employers need to provide MSD management for workers who experience covered musculoskeletal disorders. The goal is to intervene at the earliest possible point to prevent permanent damage or disability from occurring.

**Covered MSDs**—To be covered, an MSD must be an OSHA recordable injury—an injury that is serious enough to require days away from work, medical treatment or assignment to light duty work. The injury also must be directly related to the physical tasks an employee performs **AND** specifically connected to the physical work activities that form a core or significant part of the employee's job. In manufacturing and manual handling jobs, MSD management must also be provided where an employee reports an MSD symptom that persists at least 7 days, and the employer has objective knowledge that an MSD hazard exists.

**MSD Management**—Managing MSDs involves two steps. First, employers must provide prompt responses to employees who report MSDs, including providing prompt access to health care professionals, when necessary, for evaluation, management and follow-up. Second, the employer must provide necessary work restrictions during the recovery period. Where the employer refers the injured employee to a health care professional (HCP), the employer must follow the work restrictions the HCP recommends. The proposed MSD management provisions do not establish treatment protocols—that responsibility belongs to health care professionals. MSD management must be provided at no cost to the employee.

**Employer Determinations**—It is the employer's responsibility to determine whether a reported MSD is an OSHA recordable and whether it is covered by the proposed rule. These are the kinds of decisions employers make all the time in complying with the OSHA recordkeeping rule. Many employers work with health care professionals in making these determinations.

**Health Care Professionals**—Employers are to provide prompt access to a health care professional when necessary. Health care professionals must receive the following information to provide effective evaluation, management and follow-up for MSDs:

- A description of the employee's job,
- Information about MSD hazards in the job,
- A description of available work restrictions,
- A copy of the MSD management section of the standard,
- A summary of the requirements of the standard, and
- Opportunities to conduct workplace walkthroughs.



Health care professionals must provide employers and injured employees with written opinions concerning the medical conditions related to exposure to MSD hazards in the job and recommended work restrictions, if necessary.

**Work Restrictions**—Many MSDs resolve in a matter of days if the worker is able to rest the injured area. Often restricting work activity or putting the injured employee on light duty allows the employee to rest the injured area while continuing to be productive during the recovery period. The key is to find the work restriction that matches the employee’s capabilities during the recovery period and that does not expose the employee to the ergonomic risk factors that led to the injury. Sometimes, such as when no light duty jobs exist, the injured employee may have to be completely removed from work during part of the recovery period.

**Work Restriction Protection**—Work Restriction Protection (WRP) is the maintenance of take-home pay and benefits of injured employees who go on light duty or must be removed from the workplace during recovery from a covered MSD. The purpose of WRP is to get employees to report MSDs early and participate in MSD management. Early reporting of MSDs is essential to prevent the employee from suffering permanent damage or disability or to prevent injury to other employees in the job. WRP helps to achieve this by assuring employees they will not face economic loss or discrimination if they step forward and make a report. Under the proposed rule, workers put on temporary light duty must receive 100% of pay and benefits just as if they remained in the job that resulted in the injury.

Sometimes a worker will be unable to perform even light duties or no light duty jobs may be available. When the worker must be completely removed from the workplace, he or she is to receive 90 percent of pay and 100 percent of benefits during removal.

WRP continues until the employee is able to return to work **OR** the MSD hazards are eliminated or reduced to the point where the job does not pose a risk of harm to the injured employee during the recovery period **OR** 6 months have passed—**whichever comes first**. If employees receive other payments, such as workers’ compensation payments, insurance payments or wages from other employment made possible because the employee can’t work at his or her regular job, the employer can offset WRP payments against these other payments.