

Worksite modification and beyond: How the employer-at-injury and the worker can make the most of Preferred Worker Program benefits

By David Onbeiber, reemployment consultant

Worksite modification often is the major factor that helps employers and workers overcome return-to-work barriers. This article describes how the employer-at-injury can access worksite modification and other Preferred Worker Program benefits for the worker's regular work or for a new job. You also will learn how the worker can access program benefits, such as the Premium Exemption, Wage Subsidy, and Obtained Employment Purchases.

Since July 2005, the employer-at-injury may request worksite modification and other Preferred Worker Program benefits when the employer wants to bring the injured worker back to regular work or to a new job. None of the program benefits provided to the employer-at-injury count against the worker. As long as the worker remains eligible for program assistance, the worker may later offer benefits for a different job with the employer-at-injury, or for a job with a new employer.

Employer-at-injury requests worksite modification for regular work:

When the employer-at-injury wants to help an injured worker return to regular work or to a new job, the employer may request Preferred Worker Program worksite modification help within 180 days from the date the claim closes. The employer also may request the assistance

while the claim is open when medical information reveals that the worker will not be able to return to regular work because of permanent restrictions resulting from the accepted claim for injury.

Before the Preferred Worker Program can act on the request, the employer must provide a written job offer signed by the worker. A worksite modification consultant is available to meet with the employer and the worker to determine the necessary modifications so that the job is within the worker's permanent injury-caused restrictions. A maximum of \$25,000 is available to modify the job.

When the worksite modification is in place, the consultant will verify that everything is working satisfactorily and that all job duties are within the worker's restrictions. Generally, the consultant will complete a follow-up on-site visit to determine whether the worker's regular job is "substantially modified." If the job is "substantially modified," the consultant will send a letter to inform the employer it may request Premium Exemption, Wage Subsidy, and Obtained Employment Purchases for the job.

Continued on Page 2

In this Issue

Worksite modification and beyond	1
Register for our e-mail service	1
New direct link	1
Worksite modification: Tools that can be used to modify a number of different jobs	3
Employers using Job Match.....	5
A new job-search tool	5
PWP provides moving assistance for obtained employment	6

Register for our e-mail service

If you are looking for employment, we have a system that allows you to register by location to receive job postings. When an employer posts a job on the Preferred Worker Program Job Match site in the geographical location for which you are registered, an e-mail will be sent to you with a link to the job posting. For more information, call (800) 445-3948 or (503) 947-7588.



New direct link

To get to the online Preferred Worker Program or the Job Match site more quickly, use our new direct link, www.oregonpwp.info.

Worksite modification and beyond . . . *continued*

The letter will advise the employer of the time frame for making these additional requests and the dates for which the Premium Exemption and Wage Subsidy start. The employer-at-injury will have at least 30 days from the date of the verification to send the completed and signed agreements to the Workers' Compensation Division.

If the worker qualifies as a Preferred Worker, the worker and the employer-at-injury may later receive additional program benefits. For example, if the worker is promoted or changes jobs with the employer-at-injury while the worker remains eligible for program assistance, the worker may request Obtained Employment Purchases and may offer the employer benefits such as Worksite Modification, Premium Exemption, and Wage Subsidy for the new job.

Employer-at-injury requests worksite modification for a new job:

The process is basically the same as for a worksite modification request for regular work. The worksite modification request should be accompanied by a written job offer signed by the worker. When the modification is in place, the consultant will verify that everything is working satisfactorily and that all job duties are within the worker's restrictions. The employer-at-injury will have at least 30 days from the date of the verification to send the completed and signed agreements to the division.

If the worker qualifies as a Preferred Worker, the worker and employer-at-injury may later receive additional program benefits. For example, if the worker is promoted or changes jobs with the employer-at-injury while the worker remains eligible for program assistance, the worker may request Obtained Employment Purchases and may offer the employer benefits such as Worksite Modification, Premium Exemption, and Wage Subsidy for the new job.

Worker requests worksite modification for regular work:

A worksite modification consultant is available to meet with the worker and the employer to determine what modifications are needed so that the job is within the worker's permanent injury-caused restrictions. A maximum of \$25,000 is available for modification. The worker also may request the assistance while the claim is open when there are permanent injury-caused restrictions that prevent the worker from returning to regular work.

When the worksite modification is in place, the consultant will verify that everything is working satisfactorily and that all job duties are within the worker's restrictions. Generally, the consultant will complete an on-site follow-up to determine whether the worker's regular job is "substantially modified." If the job is "substantially modified," the worker may request Premium Exemption, Wage Subsidy, and Obtained Employment Purchases. The consultant will send the worker a letter that explains how the worker may request these benefits for the job. The letter will advise the worker of the time frame for making these additional requests and the date for which the Premium Exemption and Wage Subsidy start. ■



Administrator, Workers' Compensation Division

John Shilts

Re-employment assistance

Salem office (800) 445-3948

Medford office (800) 696-7161

Web site..... www.oregonpwp.info

Contributors

Jane Fernandez..... jane.e.fernandez@state.or.us

David Onheiber..... david.j.onheiber@state.or.us

Bob Williams..... robert.t.williams@state.or.us

Editor, WCD Communications and Training Section

Jenni Bertels jennifer.bertels@state.or.us

Editing, Lisa Morawski, *DCBS Communications*

Design, Shonnie Emerson, *DCBS Communications*

Preferred Worker Adviser is a publication of the Oregon Workers' Compensation Division.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this publication is available in alternative formats. This publication is in the public domain and may be copied and distributed without permission

The Adviser is printed on recycled paper and is recyclable.



Worksite modification: Tools that can be used to modify a number of different jobs

By Bob Williams

Laser range finder

The laser range finder has been around commercially for almost two decades, but few injured workers know that it can help them by eliminating certain job tasks that are beyond their permanent limitations.

You might see industrial laser range finders at construction sites and along roads and streets, in the form of surveying transits. These telescope-like instruments sit on long tripod legs and are used to set boundaries and measure distances over land. But small, lightweight, hand-held versions are available



for injured workers to replace tasks that require a lot of walking to take measurements or require using ladders to inspect and measure rooms or buildings. A laser range finder also can eliminate a tape measure that requires two hands or reaching above the shoulder to extend the tape. With a laser range finder in one hand, a worker can stand in one place and take distance measurements of 500 feet, with 1/16-inch accuracy, and eliminate the time and effort of walking those distances with a tape wheel, string, or manual tape.

With the push of a button, a worker also can use trigonometry functions built into some models of laser range finders to calculate the square footage of an entire roof, wall, or

floor. Using it that way can eliminate lifting, carrying, and climbing a heavy extension ladder to measure the surface of a roof with a manual tape measure.

Measuring interior rooms and buildings with a hand-held laser range finder also can eliminate climbing scaffolds or ladders, by allowing the worker to stand on the ground and measure floor-to-high ceiling joists or suspended ceiling frames. Quick “shots” with the laser range finder can even double-check engineering plans. For example, one Preferred Worker with walking restrictions used a hand-held laser range finder to check the spacing of concrete foundation forms and re-bar before concrete was poured. The engineer had signed off the construction. But when the worker stood in one corner and, in a few seconds, measured the entire structure without walking around, he determined that the distance between the walls was not the same as in the plan. Had the crew members poured concrete, they eventually would have had to go back, demolish the footings, and rebuild the forms — putting the project behind schedule.

Jobs that might be modified by using a laser range finder are:

- Jobs that require a lot of walking to measure
- Jobs that require climbing ladders or scaffolds to take measurements
- Jobs in which frequent above-shoulder or full-arm extension or two-handed use is needed to use a regular tape measure

These products can be found on the Internet by searching for terms such as laser range finder, laser ranger, laser distance measurement, Hilti Range Finder, or Leica Disto. Be sure to use the “-“ (not) sports, hunting, and rifle terms in the search request, so you get the industrial tools and not the National Rifle Association equipment.

Handling heavy materials

Many jobs, both blue collar and professional, have some tasks involving heavy material handling. Mechanics, repairmen, and appliance installers use heavy mechanical or hydraulic jacks to lift heavy items. Nurses and aides often use manual lifts or mechanical lifts to lift patients. But sometimes the lifting equipment is just too heavy for workers to lift or position in the right place without exceeding their permanent limitations. For example, a 10-ton truck bottle axel jack weighs 35 pounds. And sometimes a nurse cannot use steel mechanical patient lifts around a super magnet found in MRI devices.

A fascinating and little-known fact is that air can actually lift enormous weight. Instead of the mechanical ratcheting jack (like a car’s bumper jack) or the mechanic’s heavy hydraulic axle jack used to lift a bus wheel off the ground, specially built fabric or rubber air bags weighing a few pounds, using relatively tiny pressures, can lift those truck axles



and car bumpers. There are even specialized air bags in the shape of mattresses that can lift, float, and move hospital patients where metal equipment cannot be used.

Continued on Page 4

Air jacks

“Air jacks” come in two basic forms. The first, high-pressure (50-150 psi) rubber “mats,” can lift tons of



weight a few inches. These weigh 10 to 20 pounds, are 1 to 2 feet on edge, are filled by regular HD pressure air compressors, and measure only 1 to 2-plus inches thick when



deflated. “Air bags” are the second type. They use relatively low levels of pressure from an air compressor or even an exhaust pipe to lift tons of weight up to a few feet high.



Fire and police departments use air bags and mats to lift overturned cars or trucks, and airports use



them to lift airplanes stuck in mud when they roll past the end of a runway. Regular mechanics or repairmen could use a lightweight air bag (5 to 15 pounds) to lift cars and trucks instead of lifting, handling, and placing heavy hydraulic bottle jacks weighing 20 to 80 pounds. Carpenters and building movers often get under houses and use



heavy mechanical jacks to prop up or elevate floor joist beams. Instead, they could carry and place air-powered mat jacks that weigh a fraction of the steel jacks. Welders and pipe fitters could easily carry, place, and use air mat jacks instead of chain hoists or heavy hydraulic jacks to precisely align the largest of steel pipes or weldment parts for fitting and welding.



These products can be found on the Internet by searching for terms such as: air jack, mat jack, air bag jack, or pneumatic lifting.

With enough air bag mattresses, nurses could move any patient up in bed or to another stretcher with no



more than a pound or two of push-pull force. Instead of a team of eight co-workers, just one nurse could move a super heavy patient, lying down, using a reversed vacuum cleaner. There is even a new type of air bag mattress that a nurse can use to lift a fallen patient from the floor to the bed single-handedly with very little exertion.



For information on these products, look in the Yellow Pages under “Durable Medical Devices” or search on the Internet for terms such as patient airlift, air mattress, and hover mattress.

Continued on Page 5

Worksite modification: Tools that can be used . . . *continued*

Air-bearing jacks

A special subcategory of air lifter is the “air bearing.” These devices are floor-level platforms that can lift very heavy weights, pounds to tons, as long as there is a smooth, level-ground surface. Air bearings are not used for jacking or high lifting. Instead, they raise heavy items just a fraction of an inch off the floor, making them easy to move.

Air bearings are useful for furniture movers and kitchen appliance installers. As long as there is a flat floor of tile, vinyl, or short knap carpet, these sled-like



air bearings can be pushed under a soda vending machine, kitchen refrigerator, or large office copy machine. When “inflated” by the constant air blown by a reversed vacuum cleaner, these devices rise under the load and float it on a bearing of air. This makes pushing any load almost effortless.

Other jobs that could use air bearing modifications include: moving heavy boxes or machinery across flat concrete floors in a warehouse, and moving mobile home parts, boats, trucks, or airplanes along the manufacturing production lines. To

find these products, search on the Internet under terms such as: air bearing, air sled, air slide, air caster, and air dolly.



Contact the Preferred Worker Program at (800) 445-3948, or e-mail pwp.oregon@state.or.us for more advice on possible worksite modification equipment for your job. ■

Employers using Job Match

Listed below are the names and geographical locations of employers that have posted jobs on Job Match within the past two to three months.

Mama Jo's Traffic Control.....	Various locations
Wash Rite Co.	Various locations
Atomic Proportions	Portland/Metro
Caregiver Services.....	Southern Oregon
Department of Consumer and Business Services.....	Willamette Valley
Sherman Bros. Trucking.....	Willamette Valley

What is Job Match?

Visit our Web site at www.oregonpwp.info and click “Job Match Postings” to learn more. ■

A new job-search tool

The Oregon Employment Department has a new job-search tool. **iMatchSkills** is for matching job seekers with potential employers by focusing on skills.



Find **iMatchSkills** by visiting our Web site at www.oregonpwp.info, click on “Job Match Postings,” then click “iMatchSkills.” ■



Preferred Worker Program provides moving assistance for obtained employment

By Jane Fernandez

Tim, a 48-year-old service manager for a propane company, injured his knee when he slipped and fell at work. Due to permanent restrictions resulting from his injury, he was unable to return to his job.

Tim left Oregon to pursue other opportunities in California, but after several years he had not found suitable employment. Using his previous connections to Oregon employers, he was able to find a job in the Portland area as a computer technician.

Since Tim's new job was in Oregon and more than 50 miles from his primary residence in California, he used the Obtained Employment Purchases category to help cover his expenses for moving back to Oregon. The Preferred Worker Program paid for moving his household

goods as well as reasonable costs of meals and lodging during his move. The program also provided rental allowance for his new residence in Oregon limited to the first month's rent, a nonrefundable deposit, and a credit-check for that residence. After he started his new job, Tim used Obtained Employment Purchases once again to pay for a software technician certification that his employer required but did not provide.

Thanks to the benefits available to Tim from the Preferred Worker Program, he has made a smooth transition back to Oregon, and he is enjoying his new job and his return to the great Northwest. ■

