Assessing Job Physical Demands for Employee Work Profiles

Overview:

This article will discuss the importance of developing detailed physical demand descriptions related to employee job duties.

Whether it is termed "job description" or "Employee Work Profile," there are specific components that provide employees or potential employees with information. The Employee Work Profile (EWP) outlines specific information in Part I, Position Identification Information, and Part II, the Work Description/Performance Plan. According to Policy 1.40, *Performance Planning and Evaluation* of the Department of Human Resource Management, information is required that describes the employee's job purpose, competencies, education, experience, and responsibilities. What is not required is the overview of physical demands placed on the employee to perform the outlined job.

Why would the physical demands of a job be important and how could they potentially affect employees? Physical demands are those activities that require an employee to physically exert energy to perform a task. It could include, but is not limited to, the following activities: lifting, standing, sitting, walking, carrying, bending, squatting, crawling, reaching, balancing, driving, material handling, pushing, and pulling. Defining these specific requirements will help the employee understand the expectations of the job. Additionally, if this information is provided at the time of hire, an employee can determine whether he or she will be able to meet the physical requirements of the job.

Agencies can also use the physical demands of a job to their advantage. When recruiting for a position, post the physical demands in the advertisement. Providing this information during the screening process will help recruit qualified individuals who also meet the job's physical demands. If the physical demands of the job are provided to potential employees, it may help speed up the hiring process and alleviate any job placement problems.

Having the physical demands outlined in the EWP can have a positive impact on the agency's return-to-work program. If the agency takes a proactive approach and incorporates the physical demands into the EWP before a workplace injury occurs, the treating physician can be provided with detailed information in a timely manner. Remember, most physicians do not have knowledge of specific assigned job functions and will have to rely on the injured worker's description of assigned tasks. Providing the physician with an accurate and up-to-date job description that includes physical demands will help the physician make an informed decision about the ability of the employee to return to work.

Determining the physical demands of a task placed on employees can be overwhelming. Here is an excellent opportunity for the safety department and human resources department to work together. The best way to determine the physical demands of a job is

to conduct a Job Analysis. This is very similar to a Job Safety Analysis conducted by safety professionals. The basic concept is to observe the employee performing the functions related to that job. As the employee is performing the various functions, write down the physical demands it places on the body. Be sure to document the time it takes to complete the tasks, how long the employee performs a certain activity, the tools used, the type of environment the employee is being exposed to (hot, cold, outside, inside, noise), and whether or not the employee is working alone or with a team of individuals. Be sure to note any personal protective equipment used or needed, such as safety glasses, hard hats or gloves.

The Office of Workers' Compensation has developed a resource that may aid agencies in documenting physical demands. The Physical Capabilities Evaluation (PCE) Form can be found at the following link http://www.covwc.com/capabilitiesform.php.

Working together, human resources and safety should be able to identify potential risk factors that could lead to an injury and then develop strategies to reduce or eliminate the exposure. Additionally, the knowledge gained from a Job Analysis can help supervisors and human resources representatives determine if modifications or accommodations can be made to bring an injured worker back to work.

Look at the sample functional job description that accompanies this article. Starting on page one, the agency has defined the essential, non-essential, and miscellaneous job functions. Further, the agency defines the type of equipment that the employee will be using, what personal protective equipment the employee will be required to wear, as well as the conditions of the work environment. On pages four through seven, the critical demands of the job are explicitly detailed. The agency has incorporated weights of objects, length of time performing a task, how often the employee is expected to perform the task, the height at which various tasks may be conducted, and various positions the employee may have to assume. The job description outlines what will be expected of the employee and can help the physician determine if the employee will be able perform the job.

Incorporating physical demands into EWPs has a clear advantage to both the agency and employee. It defines employee job expectations and can play a critical role in the reduction of workers' compensation costs.

Reference:

Virginia Department of Corrections. (1997). *Functional Job Description: Corrections Officer-72017 and Corrections Officer, Senior-72013.* Commonwealth of Virginia.