

Injured workers outlook is brighter under Bill 162

A worker who is hurt on the job has less chance of returning to his or her pre-accident job with every day away from the shop floor, the

construction site or the desk. Research studies show that a worker who has not been able to return to his or her old job for a

year has only a 30 per cent chance of ever returning to that job. With the passage of time, chances of a return decrease even more rapidly.

Today, the outlook is a lot brighter, thanks to some of the latest changes to the Workers' Compensation Act introduced with Bill 162.

Bill 162 became effective on January 2nd, 1990, and affects virtually all employers and workers in the province. It represents the most dramatic reform to the system since the introduction of workers' compensation in Ontario 75 years ago.

According to John Boyd, Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant at the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), "A key goal of the recent Bill is to reintegrate injured workers into the workforce more quickly and successfully than in the past by providing for more timely and effective vocational rehabilitation services. The vocational rehabilitation provisions are meant to help alleviate the adverse effects of injury or disease by re-establishing, as much as possible, a worker's pre-accident earnings - the earnings the worker was making before the accident."

Before the changes contained in

Bill 162, some injured workers could wait up to 18 months before participating in a vocational rehabilitation program - a delay that often resulted in additional and unnecessary hardships on a family's budget, not to mention its morale.

Boyd notes that before Bill 162, the Board had no precise mandate to communicate with an injured worker within a specified timeframe for vocational rehabilitation services. "This was of concern to a lot of people - the possibility of such a long wait and the negative effect this has on a worker. The worker begins to consider himself or herself 'disabled' and then recovery and returning to work is very difficult," comments Boyd.

Now, the WCB staff must contact any worker who has not returned to his or her job within 45 days of an accident being reported. It is at this early, initial stage that the Board determines whether the worker could benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.

As well, under Bill 162's provisions, the WCB must offer a vocational rehabilitation assessment to any worker remaining off work for more than six months. This assess-

ment may include an evaluation of the worker's physical abilities, aptitude tests, analysis of vocational skills, educational achievements and literacy and language skills - in short, an evaluation of all the different elements that may have an impact on a worker choosing a new, suitable vocation.

The concept of early intervention is supported by a series of regular reviews of a worker's progress and/or needs. The initial Board contact is followed by regular contacts every six weeks. Once a worker is in a vocational rehabilitation program, the Board meets with him or her every two weeks. This connection continues even after the vocational rehabilitation program is completed, with contacts at six months and one year later.

The new vocational rehabilitation provisions also state that any injured worker participating in a Board-authorized vocational rehabilitation program will receive benefits at 90 per cent of his or her pre-injury earnings.

To learn more about the WCB's vocational rehabilitation services, contact the Vocational Rehabilitation Consulting Services Branch or the local WCB office serving your area.

Whiting questions need for election

In a press release issued for publication, the probability of a Provincial election this fall has been called "a shameful waste of hard-earned tax dollars" by Halton North Progressive Conservative (PC) candidate Dave Whiting.

Chief Election Officer Warren Baille has estimated the tab for the election will cost Ontario taxpayers \$40 million - tax revenues Mr. Whiting says would be better spent pursuing such broken 1987 Liberal election promises as the construction of 102,000 affordable rental units (about 20,000 have been built to date); the addition of 4,400 new hospital beds (there has been a net loss of 2,000 beds); and getting the thousands of Ontario public and separate school children currently in portables out of them and into regular classrooms (the number of children in portable classrooms has increased since 1987).

"The excuse for an election call is that this Government claims to have almost completed work on the mandate it received from Ontarians in 1987," explains Mr. Whiting. "The Liberal record with respect to affordable housing, health care, education, Sunday shopping, auto insurance and the environment suggests to me that they should be looking at their unfinished agenda as opposed to fabricating a completed agenda as an excuse to go to the polls."

Mr. Whiting adds that Ontario Premier David Peterson's pending

decision to seek a new mandate will be based on "not much more than pure political opportunism."

"The polls appear to be in his favour at the moment," he explains. "However, I believe this support is soft because the public is just now beginning to pay for five years of Liberal excesses - most notably the service payments on Ontario's \$40 billion debt and its recent and punitive auto insurance scheme."

Mr. Whiting adds that there is one other issue on the horizon that will figure largely in Mr. Peterson's decision to seek re-election.

"Mr. Peterson and others in his government have a court date with former Liberal Party fundraiser Patti Starr in October," he says. "The evidence that comes out of what many people consider to be the biggest political scandal in Ontario's history could be very damaging to Ontario Liberals."

"Mr. Peterson has little hope of re-election if he completes the five-year mandate he was given and a glimmer of hope if he ends his current mandate soon - unprecedented for its governing length and lack of accomplishments as it may be."

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