

Oregon Program Funds Injured Employee's Return to Work

Leonardo Alvarez has worked for many years at Timber Products Company in Medford, Oregon. Leonardo's job as a hardwood veneer grader requires him to sort 1,800 to 2,000 sheets of veneer a day for the panels that Timber Products produces.

Over time, through constantly moving his upper extremities to different heights, Leonardo began to experience severe pain from the repetitive motion.

Leonardo was concerned that he might not ever be able to return to his longtime position as the movements needed to perform his duties were causing him enough pain that he could no longer perform his job. Timber Products actually looked at other jobs around the plant for Leonardo to move to. Unfortunately, there were no good matches for his skills. Timber Products found itself in a bind. It didn't want to lose its valued, longtime employee, but the equipment he needed to continue working was expensive.

The State Accident Insurance Fund (SAIF), Oregon's not-for-profit, state-chartered workers compensation insurance company, is Timber Products' carrier. SAIF helps nearly 80% of injured workers with disabling claims return to work within the first 60 days. So the focus became getting Leonardo back to his regular job where he excelled.

SAIF was able to introduce Timber Products to the Preferred Worker Program (PWP). This program encourages the reemployment of qualified Oregon workers who have permanent disabilities resulting from on-the-job injuries and who are unable to return to their regular work because of those injuries.

Employers can access up to \$25,000 for employment-related purchases—including

tools, equipment, furniture, and clothes—either for modified work or to update the employee's regular workstation.

Leonardo's workspace required the installation of a costly hydraulic device that elevates the sheets of veneer. Between money from PWP and Timber Products' own money, they were able to purchase the needed equipment, which enabled Leonardo to return to work in a permanently modified position.

"It's very heartwarming to have a success like this," stated Jackie Maltzan, senior lead adjuster at SAIF Corporation. "The worker gets to stay with their employer and finish out their working life, and Timber Products gets to keep a valued employee."

"I want to thank SAIF for paying all of my medical bills and for getting the needed equipment that allowed me to return to my job," said Leonardo.

Eric Cullen, hardwood veneer superintendent at Timber Products, summed it up nicely: "It feels pretty good to be able to put somebody back to work and allow them to retire on their own terms."

NCCI thanks SAIF and Timber Products for permission to share this return-to-work success story. SAIF is a not-for-profit, state-chartered workers compensation company that makes workers compensation insurance affordable and available to the employers of Oregon. For more information, visit www.saif.com.

The Preferred Worker Program is administered by the state of Oregon's Workers' Compensation Division. The division purchases items and modifies or creates workstations to overcome permanent restrictions. For more information, you can call 800-445-3948, send an email to pwp.oregon@state.or.us, or visit our website at www.oregonpwp.com.