

PREFERRED WORKER Adviser

Summer 2007

FAQs about Obtained Employment Purchases

by Dan Gammon

Q I just started a new job. This will be my second employer since becoming a Preferred Worker. On my first job, I was required to purchase work clothes and several tools under the Obtained Employment Purchase agreement. My new employer also requires me to bring certain tools for the job. Can I request tools again under the Obtained Employment Purchase agreement?

A Yes, as long as the tools requested are not duplicates of the previous purchase and are required and not provided by the employer. The maximum amount allowed for the tool category is \$2,000.

Q I received moving assistance from the Preferred Worker Program in July 2001. Am I still eligible to request moving assistance under the Obtained Employment Purchase agreement for a second time?

A Unfortunately, since our rules changed in October 2001, we can authorize only one use of moving assistance per eligibility period. This is true even if the original move came under the old rules. Because you have already received moving assistance during this eligibility period, we could not approve another use.

Q As a Preferred Worker, how many times may I use each category under Obtained Employment Purchases (i.e., clothing, tools and equipment, training, and/or moving expenses)?

A You may use each Obtained Employment Purchase category except moving expenses twice during a period of eligibility: once with one employer and once with a different employer. You are allowed only one move within Oregon per eligibility period. ■

A Worksite Modification success story

By Dan Gammon

Kevin, a 42-year-old painter, injured his left arm while working. He initially returned to work for a "big-box" store for a short period but left this job for a more challenging position as a foreman in a small vineyard in Yamhill County.

Kevin's new duties include supervising two to eight employees in the care and maintenance of a 21-acre vineyard. He operates a tractor to apply pesticide and fertilizer and to

till soil; installs and replaces posts that support grape vine rows; installs wire used to train and support vines; performs maintenance on equipment and buildings; gathers periodic soil samples; obtains fruit samples to determine acidity and fruit maturation; keeps records of work activities, maintenance, and inventory; positions bins at harvest time and supervises harvest activi-

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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.

Questions & Answers: Eligibility for the Preferred Worker Program

by Dan Gammon

Q I've had several on-the-job injuries over the years, but my eligibility for the Preferred Worker Program has never been determined. After my most recent injury, I was released for regular work. Does this mean that I'm not eligible for the Preferred Worker Program?

A Based on your most recent claim, you are not eligible for the Preferred Worker Program because you were released for regular work. However, the Preferred Worker Program staff will also determine if you qualify for the Preferred Worker Program benefits under your other disabling claims. Since your eligibility has not been reviewed before, if you were not able to return to your regular work because of permanent, injury-caused restrictions from one of your other closed claims, you may be eligible for the program, and if you are, you will receive a Preferred Worker card.

Q How much time do I have to send you a request for premium exemption and wage subsidy?

A If you send your completed requests for premium exemption and wage subsidy within 30 days from the day that you start work, the start date for premium exemption and wage subsidy will be the day you started the job. If you send the completed requests more than 30 days from the date you started work, then the start date for the requests will be the day after you send the completed requests to the Preferred Worker Program.

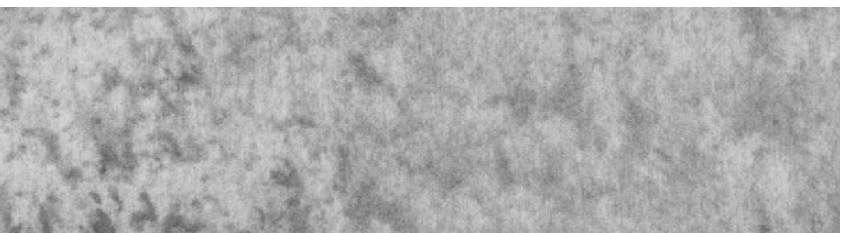
Q Because of restrictions from my injury, I need power tools to do my job. I'm concerned that the tools could be stolen. Will the Preferred Worker Program pay for a cabinet with a lock?

A Since July 1, 2005, worksite modification assistance may include lockable storage for worksite modification items that are not secure when the employer or worker does not have an available way to protect the items. The program may provide a maximum of \$2,500 to secure worksite modification items.

Q I understand that the employer-at-injury can now request Preferred Worker Program assistance to help return its injured workers to work. My doctor told me that because of my accepted claim, I would not be able to go back to my old job. If my employer receives Preferred Worker Program benefits, does that mean that I will not be able to ask for help later if I need assistance?

A Since July 1, 2005, the employer-at-injury can ask for Preferred Worker Program assistance. The worker must agree to accept the job by signing a written job offer. Any assistance that is provided to the employer is not counted against the assistance that is available for the worker to use at a later date.

For example, the Preferred Worker Program may approve the employer's request for worksite modification, premium exemption, wage subsidy, and obtained employment purchases for modified regular work or for a new job with the employer-at-injury. If the worker starts a new job with the employer-at-injury, or starts a job with a new employer while he or she remains eligible for the Preferred Worker Program, then the worker may request the same benefits for the job with the employer-at-injury or for the job with the new employer. ■



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Return-to-work success story

by Jane Fernandez

Harry was a 47-year-old auto mechanic when he injured his back in 2003, lifting a large wheel rim. After his doctor told him he would never be able to work as an auto mechanic again, he retrained as a medical technologist and began working for a large medical center. He offered his new employer premium exemption and wage subsidy benefits, and the employer was then exempt from paying the workers' compensation premium on Harry's salary for up to three years and was reimbursed 50 percent of Harry's gross salary for his first six months of employment.

Harry found that he needed specific clothing (scrubs) for his job, and

he used the Obtained Employment Purchases provision of the Preferred Worker Program to obtain these items. He was able to purchase enough scrubs and a pair of shoes for \$396, just under the category limit of \$400.

In addition, he used several other categories of Obtained Employment Purchases, such as the occupational certification and licenses category, which provides reimbursement of up to \$500 when certification and/or licensing is required and not provided by the employer.

In order to keep his certification current, Harry was required to complete continuing education credits.

Using another Obtained Employment Purchases category, which covers tuition, books, and fees, he was reimbursed \$330 to attend a three-day conference sponsored by the Oregon Association for Clinical Laboratory Science and the Oregon State Society of American Medical Technologists. He completed 18 continuing education credits by attending the conference. Since the conference was held at a site that required overnight travel, he was also reimbursed \$467 for lodging, meals, and travel.

Using the Preferred Worker Program, Harry was able to start — and thrive in — his new career. ■

Meet Tim Kessel

by Darren Heath



Tim Kessel

Tim Kessel is a big Seattle Mariners fan, and every time he helps an injured worker return to the job through one of the worksite modifications that

he's recommended, it's like hitting a home run out of Safeco Field.

As the newest reemployment consultant working for the Reemployment Assistance Unit in Salem, Kessel knows it can be challenging for a worker returning to the workplace following recovery from an injury. So, he endeavors to make that challenge less daunting.

Once Kessel is assigned to help an injured worker, he obtains a copy of the worker's permanent injury-caused restrictions and limitations from the insurer and determines how best to help that worker through a worksite modification.

These modifications may include tools, equipment, and worksite redesign required to help overcome the worker's injury-caused limitations. With the worksite modification in place, the worker is hopefully able to perform the job.

Kessel finds the most common worksite modifications involve new chairs and desks. One way he finds the best equipment to meet the needs of the worker is through researching vendors and new technology using the Internet. He also pursues leads that fellow reemployment consultants share with him. In this way, he ensures the worker receives the most informed service possible.

Kessel's job often requires him to travel throughout Oregon. This is something he enjoys, as it allows him the opportunity to meet the worker face-to-face. From the worker's first inquiry with the Preferred Worker Program to the final implementation of the worksite modification, Kessel is able to see many success stories from beginning to end.

One such recent success story involved a worker who was reemployed at the same company after his first worksite modification didn't completely allow him to perform his job.

"The employer wanted to keep the worker at the company and worked with us to make that happen," Kessel said. "That is a rare occurrence."

After the employer rehired the worker as a warehouse manager from his original position as a project manager, Kessel recommended the worksite modification of a warehouse picker that enabled the worker to safely retrieve stock from high shelves. The other benefit of the worksite modification was that other warehouse workers could use the warehouse picker — making it a win-win situation.

Outcomes like this give Kessel tremendous job satisfaction and keep him happy in his new role.

Keep hitting them out of the park, Tim! ■



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A Worksite Modification success story, *continued from Page 1*

ties; prepares sites for new plantings; and performs and supervises vine cultivation (pruning, training, and supporting vine growth). To perform his tasks, Kevin uses hand tools, a tractor, and forms for recording activities and test results.

Kevin encountered some tasks that were beyond his physical capacity and contacted the Preferred Worker Program (PWP) for worksite modification assistance. A PWP consultant met with Kevin and his employer and identified the following tasks as barriers to his continued employment: lifting equipment attachments to and from tractor mounts that weigh more than 50 pounds; pulling wire used to support vines, requiring repeti-

tive flexion, pushing, and pulling of both arms; lifting/loading equipment and supplies to be used in the vineyard; and using manual tools to remove tractor components, requiring a force exceeding 50 pounds.

After reviewing these tasks, the PWP consultant, employer, and Kevin agreed on the following solutions: a front loader attachment to lift and move equipment and supplies exceeding 50 pounds; an ATV equipped with a wire spool holder so that Kevin can string wire without manually pulling and eliminate repetitive flexion of his left arm; a hoist, A-frame, and a concrete pad to support this frame, to allow Kevin to mount attachments on the tractor weighing more than 50 pounds; and a set of

air tools and portable compressor to allow Kevin to attach tractor components and make repairs to other equipment.

The worksite modifications cost \$24,000. Kevin's employer also benefited from premium exemption and wage subsidy, which reimbursed the employer half of the wages paid to Kevin for his first six months of employment. Kevin said his job is now quite manageable and he feels very fortunate to have a job where he can work outdoors and learn about the fascinating process of growing wine grapes. He said the PWP assistance he received makes him much more confident about his future. ■