How employers can benefit from a physical demands analysis for all job descriptions

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A physical demands analysis (PDA) describes in detail the physical tasks expected of any worker and the physical demands associated with completing those tasks.

Completing a PDA helps employers both before and after a worker is hired. It helps applicants understand the physical requirements of the job, as well as the maximum weight they may have to lift. A PDA also assists healthcare providers administering an injury management program. It eliminates ambiguity and offers insights into the physical demands required, so healthcare providers can make informed stay-at-work or return-to-work decisions.

There is no required format for a PDA, but it should include all tasks performed, informed by observation and interviews with workers.

Often, tasks are divided into essential and non-essential (those which do not provide a barrier for a person to return to a job, even if a person is not physically capable of performing them).

A PDA often provides a series of tables arranged by physical demand category, including:

Mobility: sitting, standing, walking, crawling, crouching and climbing
Posture requirements: neck, back and shoulder postures, such as bending and twisting, as well as reaching
Gripping: types of gripping, particularly forceful gripping
Manual material handling: lifting/lowering, pushing/pulling and carrying, including measurements of weights, heights and distances

Beside each physical demand, a PDA lists the tasks requiring that physical demand, and the frequency of that physical demand — a percentage of the shift or number of hours/minutes per shift.

A PDA can include notes, information on work hours and shifts, and pictures. It can also include required personal protective equipment, tools and other equipment, or other physical requirements used in the job — seeing, hearing, talking, smelling or feeling.

A PDA should be easy to read by someone who is not familiar with the work, such as a healthcare provider.

WorkSafeBC offers a job demands analysis template, which includes all of the requirements of a PDA, in addition to cognitive, social and work environment requirements.