

## V I I . Return-to-Work Rates

For the first time, return-to-work rates are available for five years before and five years after the 1993 reforms. Although the division calculates three types of rates each year, the preferred rate measures the percentage of all injured workers who both return to work during the four-quarter period following the injury quarter *and* reach a level of earnings equal to 80% or more of their pre-injury wages. This rate captures the division's conviction that injured workers must earn an adequate wage before their return is considered successful.

■ *Return to work at 80% of pre-injury wage:* Pre-reform rates ranged from a low of 58.7% for workers injured in 1990 to a high of 61.2% for workers injured in 1989. Beginning in 1994, rates increased roughly one and a half percentage points to 62.3% and have stabilized at that level, rising marginally to a high of 62.7% for 1997 injuries. While the post-reform rates do not reflect the dramatically improved return-to-work outcomes intended by the re-

forms, they have remained at a consistently higher level since 1994, in contrast to the volatile and notably lower rates for the five-year period leading up to the reforms. The lowest rates over the decade were 58.7% and 58.8% for 1990 and 1991, respectively. These may reflect, in part, the modification of the wage-loss formula that was effective in 1991.

■ *Return to work at any wage:* This rate has risen very gradually with each successive year since 1990, showing that about nine of every ten injured workers return to work at some point during the four-quarter period after the injury quarter. The largest over-the-year increase occurred between 1993 (88.9%) and 1994 (89.6%). Comparing these rates, which show a consistently high rate of return for Florida workers, to the preferred rates highlights the real problem which needs to be addressed: Close to 70% of returning workers fail to reach an adequate wage level during the year following the injury quarter.

**Table 7.1**

***Florida's Return-to-Work Rates for Injured Workers  
(Injury Years 1989-1998)***

<b>Year of Injury</b>	<b>Percentage of Injured Workers with Any Wages in at Least 1 of 4 Quarters Post-Injury</b>	<b>Percentage of Re-employed Injured Workers with 80% or More of Pre-Injury Wage</b>	<b>Percentage of All Injured Workers with 80% or More of Pre-Injury Wage</b>
1989	88.9%	68.9%	<b>61.2%</b>
1990	87.7%	66.9%	<b>58.7%</b>
1991	87.8%	67.0%	<b>58.8%</b>
1992	88.6%	68.6%	<b>60.8%</b>
1993	88.9%	68.5%	<b>60.9%</b>
1994	89.6%	69.6%	<b>62.3%</b>
1995	89.7%	69.4%	<b>62.3%</b>
1996	89.8%	69.6%	<b>62.5%</b>
* 1997	90.1%	69.6%	<b>62.7%</b>
* 1998	90.3%	69.3%	<b>62.5%</b>

\*Preliminary reporting

Source: Division of Workers' Compensation Claims File as of March 20, 2000, and Division of Unemployment Compensation Wage File

Figure 7.1

**Return to Work at 80% of Pre-Injury Wage (1989-1998 Injury Years)**

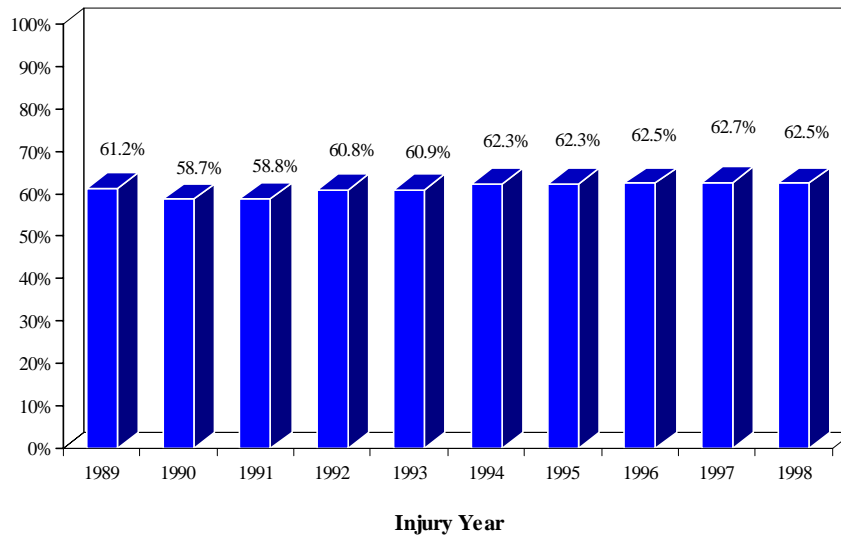
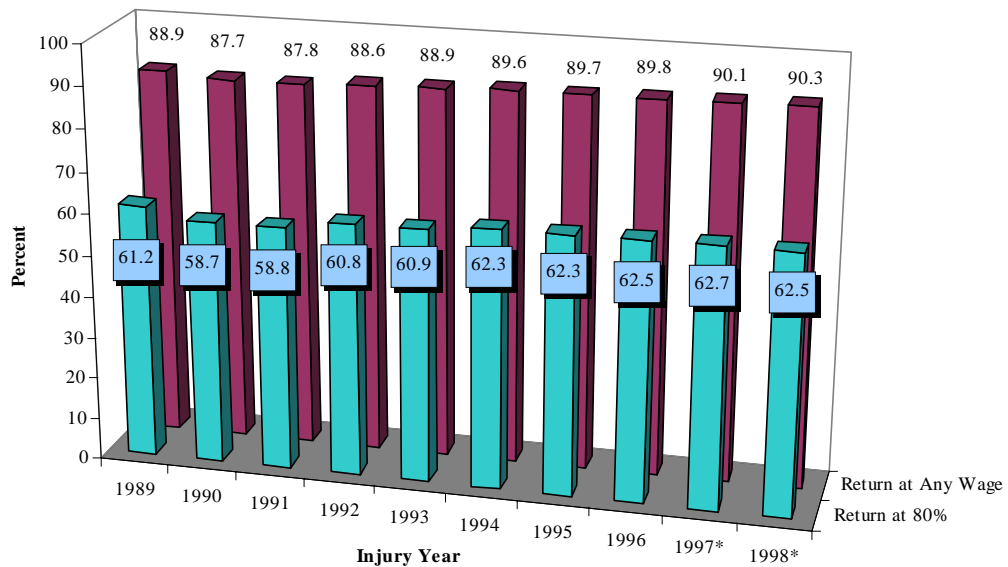


Figure 7.2

**Return to Work at Any Wage vs. Return to Work at 80% of Pre-injury Wage (Injury Years 1989-1998)**



\*Preliminary reporting

Note: Rates for return at 80% are calculated by dividing the total number of injured workers who returned to work during any of the four quarters after the injury quarter and earned at least 80% of their pre-injury average quarterly wage by the total number of injured workers. Return at any wage removes the wage criteria.

Source: Division of Workers' Compensation Claims File as of March 20, 2000, and Division of Unemployment Compensation Wage File