

V I I I . Return-to-Work Rates

The division continues to regard the return of injured workers to suitable employment an important aspect of the self-execution of the system. Successful, timely return-to-work contributes to worker well being and reduces costs to employers. Although the division still calculates three measures of return-to-work rate, the preferred measure is still 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 re-employment is considered successful.

■ *Return to work at 80% of pre-injury wage:* Pre-reform rates range from a low of 59.1% for workers injured in 1991 to 61.2% for workers injured in 1993. Following a post-reform leap of 1.2 percentage points, return-to-work rates for post

reform injury years (1994-1999) have exceeded 1993 rates hovering between 61.9% (for 1999 injuries) and 62.5% (for 1997 injuries). These data reflect a modest but sustained improvement in return-to-work rate following the 1994 reforms.

■ *Return to work at any wage:* This rate has risen gradually each year since 1991, with the exception of 1999 injuries which experienced a slight decline, showing that about nine out of every ten injured workers return to work at some point during the four-quarter period after the injury quarter. The largest annual increase, again, occurred between 1993 (89.1%) and 1994 (89.7%). Comparing these rates, which show a consistently high rate of return for Florida workers, to the preferred rates (those representing 80% of pre-injury earnings) highlights a problem which needs addressing: Over 30% of returning workers fail to reach an adequate wage level during the year following the injury quarter.

Table 8.1

***Florida's Return-to-Work Rates for Injured Workers
(Injury Years 1991-1999)***

Year of Injury	Wages > 0 in at Least 1 of 4 Quarters Post-Injury	Return to Work at 80% of Pre-injury Wage	
		Denominator: All Returnees	Denominator: All Injured
1991	88.3%	67.0%	59.1%
1992	88.9%	68.6%	61.0%
1993	89.1%	68.6%	61.2%
1994	89.7%	69.5%	62.4%
1995	89.7%	69.2%	62.1%
1996	89.7%	69.4%	62.2%
1997	90.1%	69.4%	62.5%
1998	90.1%	69.0%	62.1%
1999	90.0%	68.8%	61.9%

*Preliminary reporting

Source: Division of Workers' Compensation Integrated database as of June 30, 2001, and
Division of Unemployment Compensation Wage File

Figure 8.1

Return to Work at 80% of Pre-Injury Wage (Injury Years 1989-1999)

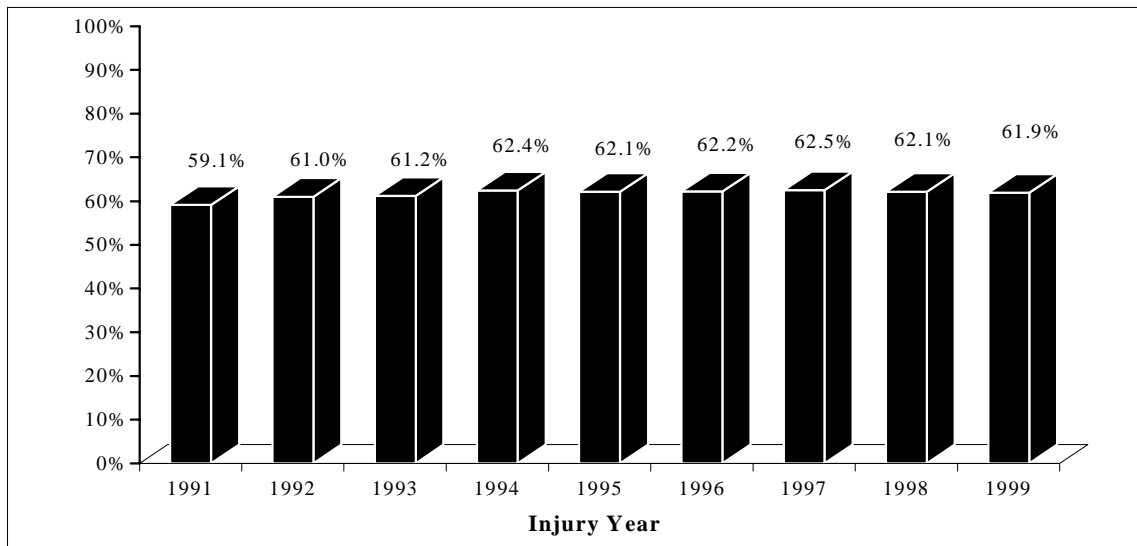
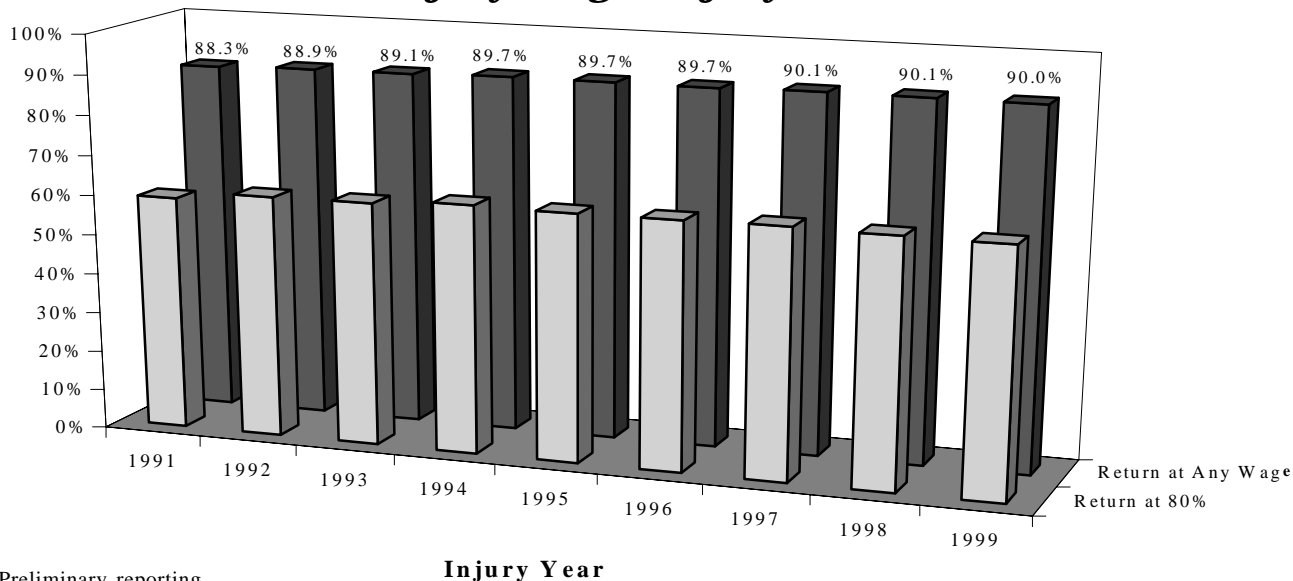


Figure 8.2

Return to Work at Any Wage vs. Return to Work at 80% of Pre-Injury Wage (Injury Years 1989-1999)



*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 Integrated Database as of June 30, 2001, and Division of Unemployment Compensation Wage File