FIRST UP IN FIRST AID

Despite all the safety precautions put into practice, millions of injuries still occur at workplaces across the country every year. As a result, employers not located in close proximity to a medical facility are required by the Occupational and Safety Administration (“OSHA”) to have procedures in place to deal with serious injuries until emergency medical personnel can arrive. OSHA’s standard requires employers to provide medical services and first aid, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (“CPR”). The available first aid services must be in proportion to the workplace hazards involved. For example, an oil and gas rig would require far more personnel and supplies than an office building.

What is first aid?

First aid is medical care that is provided immediately after an injury occurs and at the location where it occurred. It involves a one-time, short-term treatment and requires little training to administer. First aid can include cleaning minor cuts or scratches, treating a minor burn, providing non-prescription medicine and removing debris from the eyes. OSHA does not require first aid cases to be documented.

What is required of an employer?

OSHA requires that an employer have trained personnel available within four minutes of the injury in situations where life-threatening injuries can reasonably be expected to occur. This means that an employer cannot rely only on community emergency medical services (EMS), as their response time is usually greater than four minutes. In workplaces where life-threatening injuries are likely to occur, trained first-aid responders must be on staff in most cases.

If serious injuries (not life-threatening) can be reasonably be expected, the response time for trained personnel is extended to 15 minutes. In this situation, the employer should evaluate the availability and reliability of local EMS to meet this timeframe.

Designated first-aid responder

In the event the workplace meets the requirements of needing a first aid responder on site, the designated first aid responder must be trained in first aid. First aid training can be received from the American Heart Association, American Red Cross and private institutions. OSHA recommends that more than one employee be trained in first aid in case the primary employee is unavailable. The identity of all employees trained in first aid should be communicated to all employees.

As the first aid responder will likely be in contact with blood and other bodily fluids, training in universal precautions and other requirements of OSHA’s blood borne pathogen rule (Sec. 1910.1030) is required. Additionally, an employer must offer to provide the first responder with a hepatitis B vaccination, even if the employee is only performing the first-aid function part-time.

Training topics

OSHA doesn’t require specific topics to be covered in first-aid training, however, first aid responders should be trained for the injuries or illnesses that may occur in the specific workplace. It is important to note that in addition to the first aid standard, several other OSHA standards also require employees to be trained in CPR. OSHA recommends certain elements be part of a first aid training program, including training for:

- Sudden cardiac arrest
- Treatment of shock due to injury or allergic reactions and treatment of a victim who has fainted
- Bleeding and control interventions
- Poisoning principles and treatment, chemical emergency information and antidotes, how and when to contact the nearest poison control center
• Assessing severity of burns and determining intervention for the different types of third-degree burns (especially chemical burns)
• Treatment for temperature extremes-exposure to cold (frost bite and hypothermia) and heat (heat cramps, exhaustion, and stroke)
• Musculoskeletal injury treatment including fractures; dislocations; sprains, strains and cramps; and head, neck, back, and spinal injuries
• Treatment for bites and stings from humans,

While the OSHA regulation simply states that your first aid responders should be "adequately trained," it is expected that CPR be reviewed every six months and first aid training for life-threatening emergencies be reviewed and refreshed annually to ensure the first responders retain their knowledge and are ready when an emergency arises.

**OSHA Required Training**

29 CFR §1910.151 (a) and (b)

**Medical services and first aid**

(a) The employer shall ensure the ready availability of personnel for advice and consultation on matters of plant health.

(b) In the absence of an infirmary, clinic, or hospital in near proximity to the workplace which is used for the treatment of all injured employees, a person or persons shall be adequately trained to render first aid. First-aid supplies approved by the consulting physician shall be readily available.

**OSHA standards requiring CPR training are:**

1910.146 Permit-required Confined Spaces

1910.266 Appendix B: Logging Operations – First-Aid and CPR Training

1910.269 Electric Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution

**Medical musts**

First-aid responder must have a well-stocked first-aid kit readily available at the worksite. OSHA encourages employers to consult with a medical professional or trained first responder such as a local fire department to determine the contents of a first aid kit. Some industries have specific guidelines for first aid kit locations and contents. For example, if corrosive materials, such as acids, are used at your workplace, eyewashes must be available. Be sure that an inventory of the contents of the first aid kit is taken at regular intervals so that supplies don't run out during an emergency.

An important part of first aid planning is the availability of ambulance services. When developing first aid procedures, employers should work with local EMS to determine response times during the day and at night.

Accidents and illnesses still occur with frequency at work. OSHA requires a trained first aid responder to be on site if the workplace is not located in close proximity of a medical facility, or if the workplace is high-risk. In these situations, employers must implement a first aid program that provides for immediate emergency treatment performed by an individual appropriately trained in first aid. Be sure that the first aid procedures are put in writing and distributed to all employees so they are aware of what to do if an emergency arises. The outcome of an employee's injury or illness is dependent in part upon immediate and suitable first aid. Proper planning and training, including CPR, can literally mean the difference between life and death.