



Workplace Safety

First Aid Training Tips for Small Businesses

Gillian Scott and Don Sears | Mar 21, 2019

What You Need To Know

Small- and medium-sized businesses have to meet the same OSHA standards as businesses with hundreds, even thousands, of employees.

OSHA offers resources to help employers determine what their first-aid program should look like.

First-aid training programs should be individualized based on the hazards in each business, but to be OSHA-compliant, the training must include a hands-on component.

Small- to medium-sized businesses can face unique challenges when it comes to first aid. Help is here.

Like any business, they are required to provide immediate assistance if an employee becomes injured or ill at work and to have adequate **first-aid supplies** readily available. Yet with fewer employees on site, knowing what supplies to keep on hand and having someone trained in rendering first aid may be seen as an overwhelming planning task.

OSHA's Safety Regulations for Corporate First-Aid Training

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) covers first-aid requirements in the Medical and First Aid standard **CFR 29 CFR 1910.151**.

"When it comes to first aid, it doesn't matter if it's two employees or 200,000 employees," notes Josh Holmes, director of sales-industrial and safety at Acme United. "OSHA says you have to make first aid readily available."

Holmes notes that OSHA regulations also don't differentiate between types of businesses. Instead, it's up to each facility, whether an office or a factory, to examine their safety needs and determine how to best meet the regulations.

For instance, he says an office setting probably doesn't need a first responder bag (also called a grab-and-go bag). But in a small manufacturing plant, where someone could suffer a serious injury in the

middle of the facility, it may be a good idea.

“You’re going to need something that can deal with more serious wounds,” says Holmes. “We want to stabilize that victim until we can get the medical personnel to arrive.”

The number or style of first-aid product may differ from facility to facility as well. OSHA says in its publication “*Best Practices Guide: Fundamentals of a Workplace First-Aid Program*”:

“The supplies must be adequate, should reflect the kinds of injuries that occur, and must be stored in an area where they are readily available for emergency access.”

The agency recommends facilities use OSHA 300 logs, OSHA 301 reports or other records to identify the first aid supplies that are needed.

The ANSI standard, “*ANSI/ISEA Z308.1-2015: American National Standard – Minimum Requirements for Workplace First Aid Kits and Supplies*,” also offers guidance.

Need to understand the different types of ANSI first-aid kits? Read “Class A Vs. Class B First-Aid Kits: Which Is Right for You?”

Help for SMBs: OSHA’s Consultation Services

Need help developing your first-aid program? The Occupational Safety and Health Administration offers *consultation services* to small- and medium-sized businesses.

Under the free and confidential program, consultants work with employers to identify workplace hazards, comply with OSHA standards and establish or improve safety and health programs. The visit is generally a complete review of a safety and health program, but can be limited to specific problems.

Creating a First-Aid Training Program for Your SMB

The first step in creating a first-aid program for any size facility is to examine the risks workers face—and then making it specific to a company’s industry, size and facility.

“A big part of what we do is talk about what does that overall first-aid program look like for a company,” Holmes says.

OSHA includes a self-inspection first-aid checklist in its “*Small Business Handbook*.” It’s meant to be used as part of a larger self-inspection process to help small business identify hazards in the workplace.

The first-aid checklist helps employers identify whether they meet the OSHA requirements for first aid by pinpointing areas that might be overlooked, such as the posting of emergency telephone numbers.

In its “*Best Practices Guide*,” OSHA notes that a workplace first-aid program is just one part of a comprehensive safety and health management system. It identifies the four elements of a first-aid program as:

- Identifying and assessing workplace risks that could injure workers or cause illness

- Designing and implementing a first-aid program that aims to minimize the effects of accidents or exposures, complies with OSHA regulations and makes an adequate amount of first-aid supplies and equipment readily available
- Instructing all workers about the first-aid program, including first-aid training
- Periodically evaluating the program to keep it current and to make sure the first-aid training course is adequate

“First aid for small businesses is very individual in nature,” says Robb Rehberg, director of first-aid training and product development for the National Safety Council. “Often, very small businesses say they cannot afford to implement a full scale first-aid program. At minimum, what they need is to have local first-aid training, an AED and ANSI-approved first-aid kit on site and an emergency plan in place.”

It’s not enough just to call 911, Rehberg says. First aid is not about checking boxes—it’s really about having a clear logistical plan for the workers who are there in the small shop or facility. Do they know what to do without panicking?

“Know your building. Is there easy access for emergency medical services when they arrive?” he says. “It also helps to perform drills regularly. That doesn’t mean you need to call the fire department every quarter, but it means making sure people there have an awareness of what they need to do to help before EMS arrives.”

How much do injuries cost your company? Find out in our interactive Workplace Injury Cost Calculator.

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First-Aid Training Options for the Workplace Abound

“First-aid courses should be individualized to the needs of the workplace,” OSHA advises in its “Best Practices” publication. The agency notes that organizations such as the Red Cross, National Safety Council and American Heart Association all offer first-aid training programs.

Whatever program used, first-aid training should include:

- An emphasis on skills training and quick response
- Instruction on preparing to respond to a health emergency
- Instruction on assessing a situation and a victim
- Instruction on responding to life-threatening emergencies, which may include using CPR, using an AED, stopping heavy bleeding, or helping someone who has been poisoned
- Instruction on responding to emergencies that aren’t life-threatening, which may include burns, wounds, fractures and eye injuries

Hands-on training is also required. Jonathan Epstein, senior director of science for the American Red Cross, says online-only training courses will not meet OSHA training standards.

“There’s a lot of internet-based training that does not qualify from an OSHA standpoint as approved training,” he says.

First Aid in Small and Medium Companies: Logistics, Communication and the Human Element

Robb Rehberg has been working with the National Safety Council on first-aid consulting and training for 27 years. One of his biggest takeaways for small and medium businesses is that most companies only realize the value of first aid after an unfortunate event or mishap. He says it “really resonates” once it’s too late.

At issue: Not thinking about those moments and dire minutes when an emergency is happening—and what it does to both the rescuer and coworker. For a small company, the “rescuer” means a coworker.

What happens when you see too many bends in a broken limb? How will a rescuer respond to seeing an injured-person’s blood?

“There’s an adrenaline rush when an emergency happens for the rescuer,” he says. “It can be hard for a rescuer to refrain from responding in a way that will make it worse for the victim. I call it the ‘cliff of shock.’”

Training and drills can help prepare workers for these harrowing moments.

Businesses looking for convenient training courses have lots of options. At the Red Cross, choices include community-based options (courses open to all members of the public), company-specific programs that are 100 percent in-person, company-specific programs that blend online training with hands-on training and full-service training.

Blended training options allow workers to complete online portions in multiple, short blocks or while they’re at home, minimizing the time they’re away from their work tasks.

“Instead of being in a class all day, they can be in a class for two hours,” Epstein says.

In a full-service option, the Red Cross sends an instructor to the workplace. All equipment is provided, but the facility needs to provide a meeting space and some audiovisual equipment, such as a DVD player and screen.

“That’s really great for a medium-sized company that may have a training room or may have a break room and can take people off the floor at the same time,” Epstein says.

Whatever the format, the core first-aid training offered is the same in all courses. However, Epstein notes, the Red Cross offers optional modules that employers can add on to focus on specific issues, such as anaphylaxis, *bloodborne pathogens* or severe bleeding.

Epstein also notes that while theoretically, a business can train only 10 percent of its employees so it has a cadre of prepared employees, the Red Cross likes to see all employees trained in first aid.

“When you get to very small companies, you have to ensure from a staffing perspective that there’s someone there who is able to respond to the emergency,” Epstein says. “So if you only train one or two people and they both happen to take vacation the same week, have you now ensured that there is an appropriate response in the organization should something happen? It’s a challenge for small businesses.”

Epstein notes that some very small businesses may be exempt from training requirements altogether.

"We always say check your local laws, the local regulations," he says. "Some states, based on the number of employees you have, you may not be required to have any training. Usually, when you get over five or six employees, that's when you have to have the training."

How do you address first-aid training in your workplace?

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