

First Responders to the Rescue!



by Debbie L. Feldman

You're eating lunch in the company cafeteria when suddenly a man collapses and passes out. Or a fellow worker gets hit in the head with a heavy piece of machinery. What do you do?

First responders act rapidly

When people stop breathing and their heart stops beating, there is a better chance they will survive if someone provides basic life support within 4 minutes. It's crucial that the first person who responds to the emergency sizes up the situation, calls 9-1-1 and begins CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) immediately. Whether a co-worker is injured on

the job or has a heart attack, the first few minutes of first aid are critical.

That's where first responders come in. "The first response team is a team of trained employees who will be called to respond to any emergency in the workplace," says Kelly Alexander, media associate at the American Red Cross.

Even though first responders are regular employees, and not medical specialists, they have training in CPR and basic first aid. They are the first ones on the scene and stay with the victim until medical help arrives — either paramedics or emergency medical technicians (EMTs).

First responders are trained to respond to amputations, lacerations, debris in the eyes, slips and falls, chemical burns, fractures, sprains, strains, and cardiac arrest (heart attack). They may even need to respond to an employee who is in childbirth.

The number of workers on a first responder team depends on how many people work at your site, the number of shifts, the kinds of hazards at your workplace, and the type of injuries that happen most often at your company. Other factors include the location of the nearest medical facility and the type of first aid equipment you have at your workplace — such as automated external defibrillators (AEDs) and oxygen.

When you choose a first responder team, keep in mind that volunteers may work out best

because they are more motivated and probably have an interest in first aid.

According to Barbara Caracci, master trainer at the National Safety Council's First Aid Institute, companies need to cover all three shifts. There should be more than one first response team member per shift trained in CPR and first aid to cover employees who may be on vacation or out sick. The number in a team will depend on the company's size, but usually a minimum of one first responder for every 100 employees is a good rule of thumb.

Make sure you have the right equipment and first aid supplies on hand. Be sure to have regular inventory inspections to ensure equipment and supplies are always ready.

Make training count

Caracci says that training should include eight hours of first aid and CPR instruction. It should also include 2 hours of automated external defibrillator (AED) training if AEDs are available on-site. The National Safety Council and its training agencies provide materials and instructors to train companies in first aid and CPR. Team members should renew their training yearly.

Alexander suggests that all first response

team members receive emergency response training. An emergency response course includes advanced training in first aid, CPR and airway management, administering oxygen, using AEDs, and bloodborne pathogen education.

Beware of bloodborne pathogens

Bloodborne pathogens are disease-causing microorganisms that carry the HIV/AIDS virus, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C and can cause infections. People giving emergency first aid can be infected from contaminated blood or other body fluids. First responders should be aware that they can be exposed each time they treat someone.

You can protect yourself from contaminants by using barrier devices, like face shields, pocket masks and rubber gloves. These devices should be kept at your work station in case you are called to respond to an emergency.

All first responders are covered by OSHA's standard on bloodborne pathogens, which requires that employers provide training about bloodborne pathogens and in using personal protective equipment. It ensures that employees receive vaccinations against Hepatitis B.

If you're called on to respond to a workplace emergency, it's good to know you can help save a life or make an injured person feel better until he or she gets to the hospital. □