A GUIDE TO FIRST AID REQUIREMENTS IN A SMALL BUSINESS
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Introduction

Health and safety legislation requires that all employers provide adequate first-aid equipment, personnel and facilities to enable first aid to be given when the need arises. The types of potential injury and the degree of risk depend on the nature of the business. Not all workplace incidents requiring first aid are the result of injuries; some arise when employees become ill while in the workplace.

This factsheet explains the legal requirements regarding first aid and what employers need to do to comply with the legislation.

What does first aid mean?

First aid means treating and stabilising any injuries or illnesses as soon as possible to preserve life and minimise the consequences of injury or illness until the injured or ill person can receive professional medical attention. First aid also refers to the treatment of minor injuries that would otherwise receive no treatment or would not be treated by a medical practitioner or nurse.

What legislation covers first-aid requirements?

In England, Wales and Scotland, workplace first aid is covered by the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981. The 'Approved Code of Practice and Guidance', which accompanies the Regulations, provides detailed information about how to comply with the Regulations and is published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE, www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/74.htm). In Northern Ireland similar provisions are made by the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982.

What first-aid provision must employers make?

The Regulations apply to all types of workplace. They require every employer to make adequate first-aid provision for all employees. The minimum that every employer should provide is a suitably stocked first-aid box and an 'appointed person' to take charge of first-aid arrangements. Employers must ensure that employees are informed of first-aid procedures. A good opportunity to give a new employee this information is during their induction but, depending on the type of business or organisation, it might be necessary to carry out separate training.

At least one notice should be posted at all workplace premises to indicate the location of first-aid equipment and the names and locations of the appointed persons and any trained first-aiders. All first-aid information should be updated whenever necessary. If any employees have reading or language difficulties the employer should make special arrangements to ensure these employees are informed about first-aid procedures.

As part of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, a business or other organisation that employs more than five people must have a written statement of its general policy on health and safety at work. In addition, those with 10 or more employees must have an accident book, which should be kept for at least three years from the date of the last entry.

Employers must, by law, report certain accidents and illnesses at work to the HSE. Go to www.hse.gov.uk/riddor for information on the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR).

It is also the employer's responsibility to arrange necessary contacts with external services regarding first aid, emergency medical care and rescue work.

What first-aid provision does a self-employed person require?

Self-employed people are required to ensure that they have adequate facilities to provide first aid to themselves while at work.

For self-employed people who work in a low-risk activity, such as office work at home, a normal domestic first-aid kit is adequate. An individual's working circumstances will highlight any other need for a first-aid kit. If, for example, their work involves driving long distances or they are frequently on the road, it is good practice to keep a first-aid kit in their vehicle.

Many self-employed people operate from shared premises with other self-employed people or small businesses. It may be sensible to make joint arrangements with the other occupiers for first-aid cover for everyone on the premises. The HSE recommends that there is a written agreement for any such shared arrangement.

How can an employer assess what level of first-aid provision is required?

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, every employer is required to carry out a risk assessment of their workplace. This will help to determine what level of first-aid provision is needed.

Factors that employers should take into account include:

• How many employees there are (if any).
• Whether any employees are particularly at risk, such as inexperienced employees or those with disabilities or special health problems.
• The working hours and whether there is any shift or night working.
• Whether staff are spread across different locations.
• Whether the business is 'low-risk' (such as clerical) or 'high-risk' (for example the construction industry or a sector working with hazardous substances).
• Any previous history of accidents and illness in the workplace.
• Whether members of the public visit the workplace.

The HSE provides an online first-aid needs assessment tool at www.hse.gov.uk/firstaid/assessmenttool.htm.
How many first-aid staff should an employer have?

Every employer must, as a minimum requirement, have an appointed person to deal with first aid. An appointed person has responsibility for first-aid equipment and takes charge of situations where an injured or ill employee will need help from a medical practitioner or nurse, but should not attempt to give treatment outside of their remit.

In addition, an employer might consider providing one or more ‘first-aiders’. First-aiders are employees who can perform the same duties as an appointed person, but who also have a certificate of competence indicating that they are trained and qualified to provide first aid.

The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 do not stipulate the specific number of appointed people and first-aiders or the amount of first-aid equipment that employers should provide. However, they require employers to provide ‘adequate’ and ‘appropriate’ equipment, facilities and personnel to enable first aid to be given to employees if they are injured or become ill at work.

This will vary depending on the size and type of business. The HSE suggests the following:

In lower-risk workplaces (such as shops and offices):
- Fewer than 25 staff: at least one appointed person.
- Between 25 and 50 staff: at least one first-aider.
- More than 50 staff: at least one first-aider for every 50 people or part thereof.

Higher-risk sectors (such as most construction, chemical manufacture, light engineering, assembly work and food processing, or those working with dangerous machinery or sharp instruments):
- Fewer than five staff: at least one appointed person.
- Between 5 and 50 staff: at least one first-aider.
- More than 50 staff: at least one first-aider for every 100 people or part thereof.

However, many employers choose to provide significantly higher levels of cover than recommended by the HSE. It is essential that there is sufficient cover for appointed persons and first-aiders who are away from the work premises for an extended length of time due to illness, holiday or other reasons.

What training do first-aiders need?

It is recommended by the HSE that at least one person in the workplace has some first-aid training (although this is not a legal requirement). A trained first-aider should have attended a First Aid at Work (FAW) or Emergency First Aid at Work (EFAW) training course. These are delivered by training providers such as the British Red Cross (www.redcrossfirstaidtraining.co.uk), St John Ambulance (www.sja.org.uk/sja/training-courses/courses-for-the-workplace.aspx) or St Andrew’s First Aid (based in Scotland, www.firstaid.org.uk).

Courses for first-aiders are usually spread over three days or several weeks. First-aid certificates are awarded for valid three years, and refresher courses must be taken when the initial certificate runs out. Annual refresher courses, which are three hours long, are not mandatory but are recommended by the HSE to avoid ‘skills fade’. There are also optional annual half-day courses. First-aiders can take further courses allowing them to administer more advanced treatment.

Employers may also need to provide training appropriate to the particular hazards in their workplace, especially where certain chemicals or machinery are involved. Official guidelines suggest that specific training is needed where:

- There is a risk of poisoning by cyanide and related compounds.
- There is a danger of burns from hydrofluoric acid.
- Higher-risk sectors (such as most construction, chemical manufacture, light engineering, assembly work and food processing, or those working with dangerous machinery or sharp instruments):
  - More than 50 staff: at least one first-aider for every 100 people or part thereof.
  - Fewer than five staff: at least one appointed person.
  - Between 5 and 50 staff: at least one first-aider.
  - More than 50 staff: at least one first-aider for every 50 people or part thereof.

What first-aid materials should be available?

There are no mandatory contents for first-aid boxes.

First-aid kits (1 person)

First-aid kits should be provided for employees who work alone or in small groups in isolated locations. They should also be provided if travel in remote areas is required, or if potentially dangerous tools and equipment are used. Self-employed people should also equip themselves with a first-aid kit.

The suggested contents of a kit include:

- A leaflet giving general guidance on first aid.
- Six sterile adhesive dressings (individually wrapped).
- One large sterile unmedicated dressing.
- Two triangular bandages.
- Two safety pins.
- Moist cleaning wipes (individually wrapped).
- A pair of disposable gloves.

First-aid boxes

Every employer must provide at least one clearly identified first-aid box. The recognised marking for such a box is a white cross on a green background.

The suggested contents of a first-aid box include:

A leaflet giving general guidance on first aid.

- 20 individually wrapped sterile adhesive dressings (assorted sizes).
- Two sterile eye pads.
- Four individually wrapped triangular bandages (preferably sterile).
- Six safety pins.
- Six medium-sized (approximately 12cm x 12cm) sterile, individually wrapped, unmedicated wound dressings.
- Two large (approximately 18cm x 18cm) sterile, individually wrapped, unmedicated wound dressings.
- One pair of disposable gloves. Gloves should be worn at all times when dealing with blood or body fluids.

Tablets and medication should not be kept in the first-aid box.

The number of boxes provided and their contents depends largely on the risks identified and the number of employees.

How often should the contents of first-aid boxes be replaced?

Although there is no specified review timetable, many items - particularly sterile ones - are marked with 'best before' dates. These should be
checked regularly and items should be disposed of safely if they have passed their expiry date. In cases where sterile items have no dates, check with the manufacturers for details of how long they should be kept. Non-sterile items should be checked regularly to ensure that they are fit for their intended task.

First-aid kits and emergency medical travel kits for overseas travel

If employees are required to travel overseas, especially to non-European countries, the employer should provide them with basic first-aid kits that may contain additional items such as insect repellant, antiseptic cream or iodine and water sterilisation tablets.

Hints and tips

• Remember that the aim of first aid is to ensure that an employee’s condition or injury is stabilised until expert medical attention can be received if necessary.

• Resources and information are available from the British Red Cross (www.redcross.org.uk), St John Ambulance (www.sja.org.uk) and St Andrew's First Aid (www.firstaid.org.uk).

• Consider supplementing the advice card in the first-aid box with a first-aid manual, to be held by an appointed person.

Further information

For practical start up and small business tips, ideas, know-how and news, go to:
Website: www.enterprisequest.com

To access hundreds of practical factsheets, market reports and small business guides, go to:
Website: www.scavenger.net

BIF 2 An Introduction to Health and Safety Regulations
BIF 39 A Health and Safety Compliance Checklist
BIF 140 A Guide to the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
BIF 265 A Guide to the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992

Books

"First Aid Manual"
British Red Cross, St John Ambulance and St Andrew's Ambulance Association
10th edition, 2014
Dorling Kindersley

"First Aid Manual"
Irish Red Cross
Dorling Kindersley

Legal publications

'First Aid at work: The Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 Approved Code of Practice and Guidance'
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
Website: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/i74.htm

'Basic Advice on First Aid at Work'
HSE
Website: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg347.htm

'First-Aid at Work: Your Questions Answered'
Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI)
Website: www.healthandsafetyworksni.gov.uk/first-aid_at_work_-_your_questions_answered__sept_2011_.pdf

Useful contacts

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is responsible for health and safety regulation in Great Britain. It publishes guidance on the health and safety obligations of employers.
Tel: 0300 003 1747
Website: www.hse.gov.uk

The Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) is responsible for health and safety regulation in Northern Ireland. It provides information on the health and safety obligations of employers.
Tel: (028) 9024 3249
Website: www.hseni.gov.uk

The British Red Cross is a volunteer-led organisation that provides first-aid training for individuals and groups.
Tel: 0844 871 1111
Website: www.redcross.org.uk

St John Ambulance provides training courses in first aid.
Tel: (020) 7324 4000
Website: www.sja.org.uk

St Andrew's First Aid is a Scotland-based charity that offers training for carrying out first aid at work.
Tel: (0141) 332 4031
Website: www.firstaid.org.uk

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