

Does your organization need a First Aid Team?
By Michael J. Ryan

When you look at the issue of a First Aid Team some thoughts come to mind. One thought is the first aid kit hanging on the wall somewhere which is usually only opened for an occasional cold tablet or band-aid and maybe you can recall a time when the local fire department or ambulance corps responded to your 911 call. Aren't these things good enough for most work place emergencies?

Several issues should be considered before you discount a First Aid Team. Is the first aid kit properly stocked for your unique work place emergencies? What would happen if the responding 911 agency was delayed, is it appropriate to transport the patient by private vehicle, etc.? Even in ideal conditions the period of time in which you wait for police or an ambulance may be life threatening if the victim doesn't receive oxygen or other life sustaining interventions. The issue of first aid training gained more exposure on December 6, 1991 when OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) mandated certain types of training to comply with Blood Borne Pathogen issues in the work place. Additionally, OSHA requires that associates working in certain environments have the ability to be resuscitated in the event of life threatening work place emergencies.

To properly answer the question "does my organization need a first aid team" a review of your organization is necessary. First, assess the actual number of associates in the building and how many are on each shift. If your organization operates in multi-locations or multi-buildings that must be considered also. Second, human resources should be consulted; they may be able to provide information on the potential sudden illnesses that may be encountered based either on past history or the associates' medical records. Third, closely review the work place process. If your organization is a manufacturing facility what types of injuries have occurred in the past and what may occur? Maybe your organization is a packager or distributor; is there dangerous moving equipment hazards? And lastly, most service industries are probably free of hazards, but not the potential for sudden illnesses.

If you determine that your organization can benefit by having several associates trained in emergency first aid procedures to provide prompt treatment you now must decide what kind of training is necessary. You'll want to ensure that there is at least one first aider to every 10 associates. This ratio allows for vacation schedules, sick time, etc. while still maintaining proper coverage. Usually, the first aid team is comprised of people interested in assisting in an emergency. These first aiders need to recognize that they will be expected to assist another associate in the event of a work place emergency and the

consequences if they do not assist. Certain work place environments will dictate what type of training is necessary. For example, where there may be bleeding, fractures, or sudden illness a *First Aid* course is needed. If your environment includes the possibility for heart attacks, choking, or breathing problems a *CPR* course is needed. Any full-service training agency should have a compliment of programs to fit most needs. In the advent of AED's (Automatic External Defibrillators) in public places and the work place, death from sudden cardiac arrest can sometimes be eliminated by co-workers. Typically your organization will dictate the type of training required and the training agency will develop an appropriate training program to comply.

Training is only part of the First Aid Team question. Now that your associates have received the training they need the right tools. The right tools include all the equipment discussed in the First Aid and CPR programs. These could include face-masks with one-way valves to eliminate direct mouth-to-mouth contact, triangular bandages for bandaging and splinting, and portable first aid kit(s) to be carried to the emergency stocked with the unique supplies for your work place emergencies.

Once your First Aid Teams are trained, in place, and equipped with the proper tools, they need to be managed. This can be accomplished in several ways. A self governing Safety Committee can oversee the First Aid Teams activities as well as scheduling coverage, checking supplies, and future training needs. The human resources department may take an active role in the First Aid Team; after all, it involves associates caring for other associates. Human resources may be better able to deal with wellness issues. Depending on the size of your facility, the facilities manager may be best suited to manage the First Aid Team(s).

First Aid Teams in general are a great way to boost moral and at the same time ensures that the organization is providing appropriate emergency first aid. Being prepared for work place emergencies helps keep the company OSHA compliant. The investment in training and tools is a fraction of the payoff if an emergency occurs. As an example, training 10 associates in *First Aid* with *Adult CPR* and then outfitting each member with a pocket facemask and 1 first aid kit is less than \$800.00 dollars.

First Aid Teams are an all around wise investment in your associates and a commitment to their wellness.