

EMPLOYERS often feel that first-aid requirements are a formality and won't need to be put into practice, or that booking staff on a first-aid course isn't a good use of their time. Some believe that if an accident occurs, the best thing to do is to just wait for the ambulance to attend. But each year, 5.5 million people are taken to A&E when three million of them would have benefited from first-aid treatment.

When you consider that the average response time of an ambulance on an emergency call is eight minutes and someone with a blocked airway has just four minutes to live, it's clear that trained first-aiders at work can make the difference between life and death.

The HSE carried out an evaluation of first aid in the workplace and found that though awareness was good, employers were usually achieving compliance with the legal minimum rather than considering fully the needs of the workplace and their responsibilities to staff. The evaluation revealed deficiencies in the content and format of the regulations. As a result, the HSE has developed new guidance which aims to rectify these problems. The changes were announced in April 2009 and will come into effect on 1 October this year.

Skills fade

In April, the HSE confirmed that the four-day First Aid at Work (FAW) course will be shortened to three days as of 1 October. The content will be similar to the four-day course, but recent streamlining of first-aid protocols, including those on CPR and casualty movement, means that students need to spend less time away from work. The teaching techniques



Ring the changes

Peter Savage explains the forthcoming changes to the official requirements for first aid at work training

Changes to first-aid training requirements

Course	Under current regulation	After 1 October
Emergency Aid for Appointed Persons Workplaces where an appointed person is required to take charge in the event of an illness or accident.	The Emergency Aid for Appointed persons is not a regulated course. The regulations recommend that an appointed person in the workplace has some first-aid training.	Where an employer has found they need an appointed person under the old regulations, they may find that after 1 October 2009 they need an Emergency First Aider in the Workplace (EFAW). This is a new course requiring one day of training and requalification every three years.
First Aid at Work (FAW) This course covers the practical skills needed by a first-aid in the modern workplace. The course gives the trainee the confidence and knowledge to deal with first-aid emergencies.	Four days every three years.	Becomes three days every three years but still covers the important life-saving techniques and treatment for minor injuries that are common in the workplace.
FAW requalification Updates and refreshes knowledge of the first aid at work syllabus, while allowing time for revision and practice sessions in preparation for a final assessment.	Two days every three years.	The course will remain unchanged at two days every three years.
Annual refresher (AR) Provides an opportunity to practise and update skills during the three-year period as a qualified first-aid in.	There is currently a general recommendation for some refreshment of life-saving skills between FAW courses, but course content and duration aren't specified.	The HSE strongly recommends that FAW and EFAW students attend a three-hour session annually.

FOCUS ON First aid

used by highly qualified instructors will ensure students will continue to be trained to HSE standards. The two-day FAW requalification, taken within three years of the initial training, is unchanged.

From October there will be a new qualification, Emergency First-aider in the Workplace (EFAW), which will require a one-day training course. EFAW is generally aimed at lower-risk premises, while the FAW course is for higher-risk sites.

As well as FAW and EFAW, the HSE recommends students attend a yearly three-hour Annual Refresher (AR) course to prevent "skills fade": it's well established that life-saving skills fade over time and that regular refreshing of first-aid knowledge is beneficial. Therefore a three-day course with a half-day's retraining each year is more effective than a four-day initial course with no contact until re-qualification in the third year.

Numbers game

Presently the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 require the number of first-aiders to match the work-



place's level of risk, currently categorised as low, medium or high. Companies must adhere to the Regulations and to the rules of any regulating bodies or affiliations connected to their industry. From 1 October, the risk categories will be reduced to just two: low and high.

St John Ambulance has developed guidance on first-aid risk assessment which will be available online from this summer. Readers can also sign up for email updates on how the changes will affect their organisation; visit www.sja.org.uk/training

Employers should check their record of accidents and ill health to assess the type of accidents that occur in their workplaces and where they happened. Shift-work, sites with several separate buildings and the distance from emergency medical services may need a higher number of staff need to be trained in first aid.

When it comes to the training courses themselves, the important thing is that staff are given the confidence and knowledge to handle first-aid emergencies, including choking, resuscitation, sudden illnesses and a range of injuries. Students are given training on using a first-aid kit and on reporting systems, and first-aiders can also be trained to use Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), which can be used to shock the heart in the event of a cardiac arrest.

Peter Savage is managing director of commercial training at St John Ambulance. For information about St John Ambulance and its range of first-aid courses for the workplace, visit www.sja.org.uk or tel 08700 104950.





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