First aid will usually be the first response to a workplace injury incident. To be able to respond quickly and appropriately, employers need to be prepared with first aiders and appropriately stocked First Aid Kits.

Under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992, all businesses—regardless of size—must be able to supply adequate and appropriate first aid facilities, to enable the employer to provide first aid treatment for employees if a workplace injury occurs or a medical emergency arises on their premises. Key requirements are detailed in Guidelines for the Provision of First Aid Facilities in the Workplace, which is available from the OSH Department of Labour website: www.osh.dol.govt.nz

Selecting the right kit

A key factor in provision of first aid facilities is to design First Aid Kits that provide the necessary items to cover the most likely injury accidents and medical emergencies that might occur in the workplace. In order to set up appropriate first aid facilities for a given workplace, employers need to consider:

- Number of staff employed
- Nature of the business
- Risk level of workplace activities – i.e. low or high risk

First aid supplies in a portable plastic container may be suitable for offices or small businesses of up to 20 people in a low risk environment. In other work conditions, first aid supplies in a sturdy metal container may suit up to 20 people.
A medium-risk business employing up to 30 people should store first aid supplies in a sturdy metal/plastic wall-mounted cabinet which can be easily seen and quickly removed from the wall. Another option for a medium-risk workplace of the same size is the same type and quantity of supplies, but stored in a lightweight portable plastic container. Larger workplaces and high-risk environments should consider installing a large, wall-mounted metal/plastic cabinet to house more extensive first aid supplies. Some companies go a step further and provide a first aid room, but may not preclude provision of individual First Aid Kits throughout the workplace if people are working some distance from the first aid room. To be effective, first aid supplies need to be readily accessible to any injured employee.

Depending on the nature of the workplace, First Aid Kits should contain key first aid supplies such as a CPR face shield, surgical gloves, scissors, dressings and bandages, saline solution, etc. Use risk assessment tools to quantify hazards and determine the optimum composition and quantities of First Aid Kit contents based on the nature and scale of workplace activities. It’s also a good idea to locate an incident register near the First Aid Kit to facilitate incident reporting.

In addition, a company vehicle is considered a place of work, so each should be provided with its own First Aid Kit. A mobile First Aid Kit can be easily stored in the vehicle and provides basic first aid supplies for an emergency.

There are a number of ways to determine how many First Aid Kits are required and what they should contain. Employers who are uncertain of their specific workplace requirements may find it useful to request a workplace survey from a First Aid Kit supplier, who will determine how many kits are needed and what type of contents are required.

Once First Aid Kits are established in the workplace, they need to be managed to ensure expired supplies are removed and used supplies are replaced promptly. Some suppliers offer a First Aid Kit replenishment service to keep supplies topped up — they can visit the workplace periodically to check and replenish First Aid Kit contents, and employers can contact them as needed to replace used supplies after a first aid incident. Getting expert advice and assistance from a qualified supplier will assist both employer and employee to avoid penalties for non-compliance with workplace safety requirements, and employers can focus on running the business.

Suppliers such as St John and NZ Safety also offer first aid training, and it’s important to ensure enough people are trained so that they can administer first aid if someone is injured or suffers a medical emergency at work. Those workplace First Aid Kits are of the most use when there are trained people who can use them effectively.

For a quick check on meeting New Zealand legislative requirements for workplace First Aid Kits, visit the St John website at www.stjohn.org.nz. It also has links to Department of Labour New Zealand, including publications such as OSH Guidance Notes on Providing First Aid Equipment, Facilities, and Training.

Further information is available from NZ Safety on Safeline 0800 100 014, or email NZ Safety at easttamaki@nzsafety.co.nz, or St John on 0800 FIRST AID (0800 347 782), or by email at enquiries@stjohn.org.nz

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