

What to Do When a Workplace Injury Happens

Even Safe Facilities Must be prepared for Injuries of Any Kind

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In the industrial environment there are basically three levels of injury accidents: minor first aid, injuries or illnesses requiring prompt medical attention, and life-threatening injuries or illnesses. Some injuries heal with a bandage; others require quite a bit more attention.

When you're the supervisor, it's your duty to be ready for the unexpected, despite your best efforts to make the work environment safe as possible. It's the human condition to do things that get us hurt—even folks who consider themselves "safe."

Depending on the kind of injury encountered, your reaction as well as those of our colleagues may run the gamut from cool and collected to screaming with panic. When there's chaos and a calm response is necessary, how do you deal with the injury in a safe, effective manner? Do you when to seek a doctor's care and when simple first aid is sufficient?

Minor First Aid

Minor first aid involves the small, everyday cuts, scratches, and burns that require little more than clean hands, a bit of Neosporin, a Band-Aid, or any materials found in a first aid kit. Minor first aid won't typically require any medical care. Employees can resume work and exercise caution, wear gloves, etc.

Medical Care

The step from minor first aid to medical care can be a significant leap, but it's important to err on the side of caution and seek care if the extent of the injury or illness is not known. This approach helps prevent a condition from getting worse (e.g., attempting to walk on a sprained ankle, exposure to toxins) and helps workers recover more quickly from injury or illness.

If a worker suffers any of the following injuries or symptoms, get them to an urgent care facility as soon as possible by car or ambulance (Do not let them drive; make arrangements for them to be driven to urgent care):

- Strain or sprain
- Suspected bone fracture
- Suspected concussion
- Heavy bleeding
- Deep laceration
- Facial wound
- Embedded debris
- Bite from animal exhibiting unusual behavior
- Disorientation or uncontrolled behavior
- Loss of consciousness not caused by narcolepsy, epilepsy, or another known medical condition
- Symptoms possibly related to chemical exposure (nausea, burning, skin irritation, respiratory problems)

Grab the paperwork: Fill out an Accident Injury Report form as events unfold. This will help you keep information straight, such as what, how, and when it happened, and even record information about the ambulance service that was called. In addition, have an Injury and Illness Incident Report. This form must be completed within 72 hours of the incident. Also make sure the incident is logged on the company web site - Safety Accident Report or Employee Incident Report. (a near miss).

Go along for the ride: An employee representative should accompany the injured party to the hospital. Before leaving, get a copy of the person's employment application with next-of-kin information, and see that relatives are notified immediately about what happened. Doing so shows your support as an employer, as well as helps you understand the nature of the injuries as any workers' compensation claims unfold.

Life-Threatening Injuries or Illnesses

In a serious injury situation **you must call 911**. A 911 operator is not only able to assist the caller but also to recruit help from other community service providers. If a limb, digit, or other body part is accidentally amputated, it should be wrapped in sterile gauze moistened with sterile saline solution or water, and kept in a watertight plastic container or bag. It should not contact ice. Attempt to preserve any small tissue, even fingertips. Treat any bloodied material, such as discarded clothing or bandages, as biohazard.

Be Prepared for Workplace Injuries or Illnesses

Train Your People with CPR and First Aid

Although the Red Cross suggests that any company with more than 50 employees should have at least one employee trained in CPR and first aid, it's a good idea for smaller companies too. CPR annually saves the lives of 92,000 individuals. CPR and first aid certifications are available from your local Red Cross. It's likely that whoever receives this training will be expected to step up and take charge when someone gets hurt.

Have First Aid Kits Handy

These kits will be a very important health resource. It's best if the employer assigns a specific person with the responsibility for choosing the types and amounts of first-aid supplies and for maintaining these supplies. The supplies should always be well stocked, should reflect the kinds of injuries that might occur, and must be readily available for emergency access. You'll want to prominently label your first aid kits with the words "First Aid Supplies." It is a good idea to have a log sheet for workers to mark which supplies they remove so that supply inventories don't run out.

Have at Least One Automated External Defibrillator (AED) Device

AEDs can be a lifesaver when a worker or customer goes into cardiac arrhythmia or stops breathing, and hasn't responded to CPR. These devices are very portable machines that are typically mounted on a wall where anyone can have access to them. An AED, upon being opened, literally talks to you (the operator) and tells you exactly how and where to apply the electrode pads and when to activate the mechanism that delivers the jolt of electricity designed to stimulate a good heart rhythm. AEDs not only save lives, but help prevent brain injury, which begins to occur three to five minutes after arrhythmia has set in.

After the Fact: Investigation, Review, and Support

As soon as the injured party has received care, conduct an incident investigation. Interview other workers to find out what they know about the incident or the hazard involved. Take detailed notes, which may come in handy in the event a worker compensation investigation is launched by the workplace insurance board.

Determine what systemic issues unsafe act or unsafe condition i.e. employees encouraged to hurry, lack of personal protective equipment, no machine guard, lack of training, etc. may have contributed to the injury, and as soon as possible move to remedy the hazard both where it happened and elsewhere in the facility, and apply compliant safety signs and labels to warn of hazards.

Finally, when injured workers come back to work, create work they can do while recovering from their injury if possible. Your workers' compensation and your on site health care nursing services may be able to provide guidance or assistance with return-to-work programs and other benefits.