



Contents of a First Aid Kit

Frequently Asked Question

November 2010

Must a first aid kit be provided in my workplace? What should be in a first aid kit? Should medications be included? These are three questions that are frequently asked.

OSHA Standard 1910.151(b) states:

In the absence of an infirmary, clinic, or hospital in near proximity to the workplace which is used for the treatment of all injured employees, a person or persons shall be adequately trained to render first aid. Adequate first aid supplies shall be readily available.

That is the entire standard concerning first aid kits, with the exception of some very specific industries such as logging. OSHA's Construction Standard, 1926.50, is very similar. It is easy to see why employers are asking for guidance. The first question is, as an employer, should you or must you provide a first aid kit in your workplace or vehicles? The key phrase is 'near proximity' of the treatment of injured employees. OSHA has consistently defined 'near proximity' as no more than 3-4 minutes if there is potential for serious injuries. They rely on medical literature which states that for serious injuries (stopped breathing, cardiac arrest, uncontrolled bleeding, falls from heights, electrocution, amputation, etc.) emergency treatment must be initiated in the first few minutes. This interpretation has been upheld by OSHA's Review Commission and federal courts. OSHA, in a Letter of Interpretation to Charles Brogan (January 16, 2007) also says they exercise discretion in applying this requirement, recognizing a longer time may be reasonable for some workplaces, such as offices.

Not many locations can be reasonably assured that an emergency medical provider will arrive in that timeframe. Therefore, OSHA recommends, but does not require, every workplace include one or more employees who are trained and certified in first aid, including CPR (LOI; Brogan, Jan 16, 2007) The standard concludes with the sentence, "Adequate first aid supplies SHALL be readily available".

What does 'adequate' mean? OSHA provides guidance in Appendix A (non-mandatory) of 1910.151.

An example of the minimal contents of a generic first aid kit is described in American National Standard (ANSI) Z308.1-1998 "Minimum Requirements for Workplace First-aid Kits." The contents of the kit listed in the ANSI standard should be adequate for small worksites. When larger operations or multiple operations are being conducted at the same location, employers should determine the need for additional first aid kits at the worksite, additional types of first aid equipment and supplies and additional quantities and types of supplies and equipment in the first aid kits.

Under ANSI Z308.1-2003, kits are divided into three different categories or classifications.

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Type I: Intended for use in stationary, indoor applications where kit contents have minimal potential for damage. Some applications for Type I first-aid kits are: general indoor use, office use or in a light manufacturing facility. First aid cabinets would fall in this classification.

Type II: Intended for use in portable indoor applications and should be equipped with a handle. Some applications for Type II first-aid kits are general indoor use, office or manufacturing environments.

Type III: Intended for portable use in mobile industries and/or outdoor applications. Kits should be moisture resistant, equipped with a carrying handle, have the means for being mounted in a fixed position, and should also be corrosion resistant. Typical applications for Type III first aid kits would be the transportation or construction jobs.

The Minnesota DOL, provides the following recommendations, in accordance with ANSI Z308.1

Item	Minimum Quantity
Sterile gauze pads, 3" x 3" or 4" x 4"	Determined by need
Absorbent compress, such as 5" x 9"	1
Adhesive bandages (1" x 3" band-aids)	16
First aid tape (1 or 2" x 2.5 yd)	1
Roller gauze (2" or 3" x 4 yds)	Determined by need
Triangular bandage	1
Antibiotic treatment (0.14 oz.)	6
Antiseptic (0.14 oz.)	10
Burn treatment (water gel recommended)	6
Medical exam gloves (non-latex recommended)	4 pairs
First Aid guide	1

The following items and the number provided should also be considered, according to the history of injuries, or the potential for types of injuries, at the work site:

- CPR barrier mask, 2 are recommended
- Cold / heat packs
- Eye pads
- Hand sanitizer
- Large burn dressings
- Automated External Defibrillator

Whether to include over-the-counter medications is a local decision. The Society for Human Resources Management recommends employers to not distribute any medications to employees. They leave open the option to include medications in a first aid kit, but acknowledge the concerns of overuse, improper use, and pilfering. Some companies opt to provide a vending machine, thereby making OTC medications readily available, but still providing a mechanism for the employee to self-select if the product is right for them. If OTC medications are to be included in the first aid kit, **ensure no medication includes a warning of drowsiness, or of using heavy equipment, or operating a vehicle.** Such medication may include antihistamines, cough or cold medications, and allergy relief medications.