

First Aid provision in theatres

From October 1 2013, the Health and Safety Committee had its requirement to oversee the training of first aiders removed. It might be appropriate at this time to review the requirements of theatres to have a first aid provision.

These notes have been prepared by **Richard Curtis**, Secretary of the Chesil Theatre and a former trainer for St John's Ambulance. It should be noted that for the purposes of this note, volunteers are regarded as employees for whom theatres have a duty of care.

All theatres should undertake a first aid assessment

Where the first aid assessment identifies a need for people to be available for rendering first aid, the employer should ensure that they are provided in sufficient numbers and at appropriate locations to enable first aid to be administered without delay should the occasion arise.

Where 25 or more people are employed, even in low-hazard environments, at least one such person should be provided.

Where an employer's assessment of first-aid needs identifies that a designated first aider is not required, the *minimum* requirement for an employer is to appoint a person to take charge of the first-aid arrangements, including looking after the equipment and facilities, and calling the emergency services when required. The appointed person to be available to undertake these duties at all times when people are at work.

Under the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981, you have no legal duty to provide first aid for non-employees (audience) but HSE strongly recommends that you include them in your first-aid provision.

To fulfil their role, appointed persons do not need first-aid training, though they may benefit from completion of an EFAW course (or other suitable alternative). Given this, and the remaining possibility of an accident or sudden illness, rather than providing appointed persons, employers may wish to consider providing qualified first-aiders.

The Regulations allow for a person to be appointed to provide emergency cover in the absence of first-aiders but only where the absence is due to exceptional, unforeseen and

temporary circumstances. Absences such as annual leave do not count. If the first-aid needs assessment indicates that first-aiders are required, they should be available whenever the need arises. This means that at all times during the working day there should be a first-aider on duty.

First-aid arrangements operate efficiently in an emergency only where everyone in the workplace is aware of them, and understands and accepts them. One way to achieve this is to develop procedures for informing staff in consultation with employees or safety representatives. They should detail first-aid provision and explain how employees will be informed of the location of first-aid equipment, facilities and personnel. The procedures should also identify who will provide relevant first-aid information to new and transferred employees

A simple method of keeping employees informed is to display first-aid notices.

The information needs to be clear and easily understood by all employees. Employers should also take steps to cater for those with reading or language difficulties. At least one notice in a prominent position at each site, including the base for travelling employees, should give enough opportunity for employees to see them. The inclusion of first-aid information during induction training will help make sure new employees are made aware of first-aid arrangements.

There is no mandatory list of items to be included in a first-aid container.

The decision on what to provide will be influenced by the findings of the first-aid needs assessment. As a guide, where work activities involve low hazards, a minimum stock of first-aid items might be:

- * a leaflet giving general guidance on first aid (for example, HSE's leaflet Basic advice on first aid at work);
- * 20 individually wrapped sterile plasters (assorted sizes), appropriate to the type of work (hypoallergenic plasters can be provided if necessary);
- * two sterile eye pads;
- * two individually wrapped triangular bandages, preferably sterile;
- * six safety pins;
- * two large sterile individually wrapped unmedicated wound dressings;
- * six medium-sized sterile individually wrapped unmedicated wound dressings;
- * at least three pairs of disposable gloves (see HSE's leaflet Latex and you)

When selecting someone to take up the role of a first-aider, a number of factors need to be taken into account, including an individual's:

- reliability, disposition and communication skills;
- aptitude and ability to absorb new knowledge and learn new skills;

- ability to cope with stressful and physically demanding emergency procedures;
- normal duties, which should be such that they may be able to respond immediately and rapidly to an emergency.

It is sensible for employers to provide first-aiders and appointed persons with a book in which to record incidents they attend. Any such book should be kept in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Where there are a number of first-aiders working for a single employer, it would be advisable for one central book to be used, though this may not be practicable on larger, well spread out sites. The HSE website (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor>) lists specific injuries that must be reported to the HSE. The information to be recorded should include:

- * date, time and place of the incident;
- * name and job of the injured or ill person;
- * details of the injury/illness and what first aid was given;
- * what happened to the person immediately afterwards (for example, went back to work, went home, went to hospital);
- * name and signature of the first-aiders or person dealing with the incident.

There is a requirement for an assessment of the theatre premises and uses carried out (although this does not have to be recorded, the HSE identify this is good practice). If the assessment identifies a level where a first aider is required then this must be adhered to and also that the expectation is that over 25 "employees" will require a first aider - this could be seen to include cast, crew and front of house, even without the audience. These points continue to highlight the requirement of having someone responsible for first aid provision in the premises and having a plan for providing cover when "employees" are using the site. There again is reference to members of the public and audience using premises and that it is good practice to include them. There is no need for an appointed person to be first aid trained, but there must be someone designated at all times the premises are being used.

Each theatre should have a designated appointed person system. For example the Director/Producer might be the designated person during rehearsals, the Workshop Manager, or equivalent, during set construction, the Front of House Manager during performances and so on. There should be a single designated person responsible for first aid provision who will assess and stock the first aid kits. Should the cast and crew of a production be larger than 25 then a qualified first aider would be required.

Records should be maintained through accident forms and are kept by a designated

person and reported to the Management Committee at regular intervals.

First Aid room

The regulations say that first aid rooms are required where there are higher hazards. This probably does not include theatres although your first aid assessment should identify the level of hazard. If a first aid room is required there are particular requirements in the regulations. If a first aid room cannot be made exclusively available, the regulations state that a room needs to be identified that can be made quickly available if required.

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