

First Aid

The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 require employers to provide adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities and personnel to enable first aid to be given to employees if they are injured or become ill at work.

Accidents can happen at any time. First-aid provision needs to be available at all times people are at work.

Employers' Duties

An employer must provide adequate and appropriate facilities to enable first aid to be given to workers.

Employers must consider:-

- the nature of the work and level of risk, eg, exposure to chemicals, dangerous machinery, manual handling, cuts, slips, trips, falls, etc. This should be based upon the risk assessment all employers are required to carry out under the MHSW Regs.
- size of the establishment - most paper mills are large with workers scattered over a wide area
- work patterns, shift work, out of hours working, lone working - there should be at least one first aider on every shift
- access to hospitals or a surgery

Employers must inform all employees of arrangements for getting first aid, including the location of equipment, facilities and personnel.

First Aid Provision

Every workplace must have at least one first aid box clearly marked with a white cross on a green background. It should contain sufficient amounts of suitable first aid materials and nothing else. The contents should be checked regularly to ensure that items are not past any expiry date.

A first aid room should be provided by employers, where the workplace presents a high risk.

First Aiders and Appointed Persons

There are two types of first aid personnel, qualified first aiders and appointed persons.

A first aider is someone who holds a current first aid certificate from a training course approved by the HSE.

Appointed persons are needed to cover for the 'temporary or exceptional' absence of trained first aiders and emergency first aid training should be given. Annual leave is not considered temporary or exceptional, and employers must appoint enough first aiders to cover periods of annual leave. Appointed persons are there only to take charge when someone is injured or falls ill, including calling an ambulance if required; and look after the first-aid equipment, eg restocking the first-aid box.

The number of first aiders will depend on the risks and hazards involved. In workplaces with relatively low risk, such as offices and shops, at least one first aider is needed for every fifty employees. Even the smallest workplace must have at least one appointed person on duty at all times when employees are at work. In more hazardous workplaces, for example factories and warehouses, there should be not less than one first aider for every fifty workers.

The GPMU view is that all members should have access to a qualified first aider whenever they are at work.

Training

First aiders must be trained on courses approved by the HSE. The main approved organisations are the St. John's Ambulance, St Andrew's Ambulance Association and the British Red Cross. Courses last for at least four days and certificates are valid for three years. More details from HSE's InfoLine, tel: 0541-545500

The employer must keep a written record of the dates when first aiders qualified and ensure that they go on an approved refresher course (for at least two days) before the certificate expires. The employer must give paid time off for training and must pay for courses. Where specific hazards have been identified, additional specialised training and equipment should be provided by organisations approved by the HSE.

Action Points

1. Make sure that employers provide first aid facilities, including the provision of a first aid box.
2. Check that all workers are aware of the first aid facilities and how to obtain them.
3. Ensure that there are an adequate number of first aiders. As a guide, there should be at least one on every shift.
4. Ensure first aiders are trained by a recognised body and given additional training where there are particular hazards.
5. Where new plant, substances or systems of work are to be introduced, ensure consideration is given to any additional first aid requirements.
6. Check that a record is kept of all first aid cases treated.