

UPDATING WORKPLACE FIRST AID KITS

To the Revised ANSI/ISEA Z308.1 Standard

By Nicole Randall

While the number of workplace nonfatal injuries reported by private industry employers ticked down in 2020 to 2.1 million from 2.7 million in 2019, according to the statistics released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in November 2021, accidents can happen at any time in any type of work environment.

OSH managers know that work sites need a first-aid program that addresses any hazards that might be present.

A good first aid kit is essential in every workplace, but it should meet the industry consensus standard. That standard, ANSI/ISEA Z308.1-2021, Minimum Requirements for Workplace First Aid Kits and Supplies, was recently revised. The new standard takes effect Oct. 15, 2022. To ensure compliance with this standard, OSH managers should review their first aid kits to make sure they contain the required supplies and verify that those supplies meet applicable performance requirements.

Revised Standard

ANSI/ISEA Z308.1-2021 was developed by the International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA) First Aid Product Group and approved by key stakeholders representing construction groups, technology corporations, testing laboratories, utility companies and others. The standard was processed and approved using consensus procedures prescribed by ANSI. ISEA undertook this revision process, the sixth since the standard was first published in 1978, to ensure that items needed to treat the most common types of injuries and sudden illnesses encountered in the workplace today are readily accessible and available.

Todd VanHouten, director of product development and innovation at Cintas First Aid and Safety, and chair of the ISEA First Aid Product Group, strongly advises employers to check their first-aid cabinets against the new standard and make the recommended changes.

“Updating first-aid stations, kits and protocols goes beyond compliance,” VanHouten explains. “The recommendations in this standard can help guide an organization’s overall first-aid program, ultimately helping to provide proper and timely treatment for all employees.”

Key Changes

This edition retains the kit classification (Class A or B, based on workplace



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environment) established in 2015, and includes several noteworthy updates:

- Foil blanket is now mandatory.** This was considered based on an assessment of similar international standards and in recognition of the multiple purposes that the item can serve, such as treating hypothermia, acting as a windbreaker or being worn as an emergency waterproof wrap.

- More specificity for tourniquets.** The standard helps to distinguish tourniquets from those types of bands used to draw blood, which are not as effective in preventing blood loss, as is intended.

- Greater guidance on bleeding control kits.** The standard provides additional details on designated bleeding control kits, which contain more advanced first-aid supplies to immediately treat life-threatening external bleeding.

- Enhanced workplace hazard assessment.** Included in the updated standard is a more robust discussion to assist the

employer in assessing risks, identifying potential hazards and selecting additional first-aid supplies relevant to a particular application or work environment, including mobile workstations or field offices.

In addition to designating classes and types of first aid kits, the new standard details the requirements for first-aid supplies and first aid kit marking and labeling.

Conducting a Hazard Assessment

Even if a workplace has already conducted an assessment some years ago, conducting a new one helps determine whether a Class A or Class B minimum fill best fits the type of hazards at a facility.

“Each work environment is unique. Making additions to the minimum requirements of first aid kits should take place based on the hazards and injuries that could occur specific to the workplace,” VanHouten says. “Employers should conduct a thorough workplace hazard assessment to help them determine which supplies to augment.”

The new standard acknowledges that there are many ways to conduct a workplace hazard assessment, but offers three guiding questions to help determine what first-aid supplies should be added or upgraded:

1. What are the hazards that exist?
2. What kinds of injuries have occurred or could occur in relation to these hazards?
3. What types of first-aid supplies are needed to treat these injuries?

The revised standard adds that field (mobile) workers shall also have access to first-aid supplies whether they are on a remote work site or in a work vehicle.

A thorough workplace hazard assessment (also known as a PPE hazard assessment) entails a comprehensive review to determine what parts of a worker’s body are at risk of injury or illness, and the potential for any types of injuries. For example:

- Bodily exposure:** head, eyes, ears (hearing), face, respiratory system, torso, hands, legs and feet.

- Potential injury types:** trips and falls, dropped objects, puncture and abrasion wounds, burns, crushing, entanglement, and dismemberment.

•Potential injury sources: machinery, vehicles, heat, chemicals and other toxins.

•Potential illness types and sources: The COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of, and risk from, airborne viruses. But that is only one of many potential illness exposures, depending on the nature and location of a workplace.

OSH managers must increasingly consider the threat of workplace violence as a factor in their first-aid planning. Gunshot and knife wounds could affect multiple workers in such incidents. OSHA (n.d.) offers insights and tips for employers on its website regarding this type of risk (www.osha.gov/workplace-violence).

Work-related deaths due to environmental heat exposure have been trending higher, according to BLS (2021) data. A 2021 National Public Radio and Columbia Journalism Investigations analysis of 3 decades of BLS data found that “the 3-year average of worker heat deaths has doubled since the early 1990s” (Shipley et al., 2021). And OSHA (2021) issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking “to protect indoor and

outdoor workers from hazardous heat.” Other climate-related risks could factor into a hazard assessment, particularly for workplaces with outdoor jobs.

In addition to identifying hazards, the assessment should determine the level of likelihood and severity of a potential injury or illness without PPE and the types of PPE required to mitigate those risks.

Conclusion

Timely attention to workplace first aid kits is imperative to ensure that they meet the revised standard. OSH professionals should ensure that an effective workplace risk assessment has been performed, and make sure first aid kits contain the right supplies that meet applicable performance requirements. **PSJ**

References

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Cite this article

Randall, N. (2022, Aug.). Updating workplace first aid kits to the revised ANSI/ISEA Z308.1 standard. *Professional Safety*, 67(8), 12-13

Learn more about the revised ANSI/ISEA Z308.1-2021 standard at <https://safetysystem.org/firstaid>.



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