

## **Protecting the Value Inside**

### ***Creating a safe workplace guards and increases the value of your most important assets – your people***

By Debra Ford

Keeping your employees safe is vital to the success of your operation. Not only are they the fuel for your continued success, your employees shape opinions about your company among co-workers, customers and local community members.

Thorough attention to injury and illness prevention can help to keep employees out of the hospital and at work – improving productivity, saving on health care costs, and strengthening your bottom line. On your road to success, the last thing you need is to get waylaid by a preventable tragedy. Just one unfortunate incident of this nature can lead to low morale, poor community and public relations, and serious damage to your organization. Each day, media report on deaths and accidents that could have been prevented.

#### ***AED/CPR response should be a part of your safety and occupational health program***

Creating and engaging your employees in an AED/CPR program is one way to demonstrate a commitment to a culture of safety and well-being while protecting them from a leading cause of death in the workplace. An AED is an automated external defibrillator, which treats sudden cardiac arrest, the killer of 380,000 Americans each year. Many organizations create general awareness about the availability of AEDs in the workplace while training smaller groups of workers to serve as a rapid response team should an incident of sudden cardiac arrest occur.

These teams are made possible by the ease of use provided by today's AEDs – anyone can be a lifesaver. A University of Washington study demonstrated that an AED can be operated successfully by the average sixth grader. AED features such as audio, video and text instructions guide rescuers in real-time during an actual rescue.

Implementing an AED program protects your employees, customers and other visitors from a condition that can literally occur in the blink of an eye and that will require an immediate response. Studies show that if victims are defibrillated within a minute or two after arrest, more than 70 percent survive. If defibrillation is delayed for more than 10 minutes, only 5 percent live, making immediate access to AEDs vital.

A defibrillating shock from an AED is the only effective treatment for sudden cardiac arrest, and, unfortunately, most sudden cardiac arrest victims do not survive because an AED is not available on the premises to save them. Studies show that EMS teams often take eight to 10 minutes or more to arrive at the rescue scene. Unfortunately for many sudden cardiac arrest victims, that's too late.

#### ***Occupational health and safety expenditures should match the risk***

Stories of workers saving their colleagues are becoming very common, due to the relatively high incidence of sudden cardiac arrest in the workplace compared to other potential causes of injury or death. According to OSHA, sudden cardiac arrest strikes more than 10,000 times each year in the workplace. Falls, workplace violence, contact with objects and equipment, exposure to harmful substances and environments, transportation accidents, and other common causes of workplace injury combined result in about 4,600 deaths a year, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Sudden cardiac arrest occurs in the workplace more than twice as often as several other leading causes of death combined.

An AED can be purchased for \$1,000 to \$1,200. The American Heart Association encourages the use of the “three-minute rule,” which means a workplace rescuer should be able to retrieve and bring an AED to the scene of sudden cardiac arrest within three minutes. So, depending on the size of the workplace, an organization will need to purchase one AED or more and invest in AED/CPR training to begin a program, and will have modest

annual expenses to maintain the program. Despite these relatively affordable costs, many workplaces choose not to have AEDs on the premises despite Good Samaritan laws that protect them from liability if a rescue attempt is not successful.

While companies still sometimes hedge on committing to an AED/CPR program, they spend tens of thousands of dollars to prevent other, less common causes of injury and death. For example, workplaces may install handrails or rope and pulley supports to prevent falls, which cause about 700 workplace deaths each year. Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors protect from fire and gas leaks. Businesses use security cameras, locks and bright lighting to prevent robbery or other crimes that may escalate into violence. Signs and warning systems are commonly used in workplaces to prevent harmful contact or exposure, and businesses take precautions to guard against transportation accidents.

Investing in an AED/CPR program places safety and occupational health dollars where they are likely to do the most good.

### ***The cost of prevention pales compared to the loss of an employee***

The cost of any kind of proactive intervention to prevent injury or death is far less than the permanent or temporary loss of an employee. In addition to the intangible sense of loss your workplace will experience, replacing a worker is expensive. It can cause lost institutional knowledge and reduced productivity, missed opportunities, and errors. Finding a replacement requires job posting and advertising, screening, interviewing, physicals and drug testing, background verification, hiring bonuses, travel and relocation costs, and management time. Once a new employee is on the job, they incur orientation and training costs. Replacing a high-level, C-suite executive can cost twice his or her salary. Replacing even an entry-level employee can cost two months salary.

Losing an employee, customer or visitor to sudden cardiac arrest when an AED is not available may have further ramifications. Your organization may be sued for a workers' compensation settlement if the cause of the arrest is work-related, or may receive a civil lawsuit if a customer or visitor dies. A preventable death of this nature may have an adverse effect on employee morale and company reputation.

On the other hand, adding an AED/CPR program to your safety and occupational health efforts will solidify your organization's defense against preventable accidents and tragedies. Your organization's leaders can demonstrate foresight by making a reasonable and equitable investment against a leading cause of death. This wisdom may save a life some day, and, in the meantime, will assure everyone in your workplace that help for a sudden cardiac arrest victim is less than three minutes away.

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