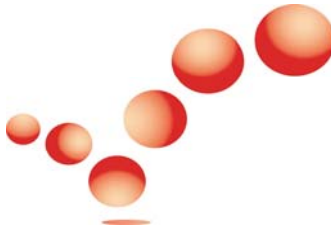


OSHA's Letter of Interpretation

Everything You Wanted to Know About First Aid Kits but Didn't Know Who to Ask



Presented By
The Carlyle Consulting Group

For a free subscription to our free
monthly e-newsletter visit

www.The-OSHA-Advisor.com

866.227.5953

Understanding OSHA Regulations & Interpretations

Featured Letter of Interpretation: First Aid Kits

This month we discuss a very common question regarding first aid kits. When does OSHA require a first aid kit? What contents are required? What if you are in a “low-hazard” industry?

Well I suppose we could make a judgment call on some of these issues; however what we want to know is “What does OSHA say?” To answer that question, let’s review a very comprehensive Letter of Interpretation from OSHA dated April 18, 2002.

Note the following key points:

Paragraph (b) of 29 CFR 1910.151 requires that in the absence of an infirmary, clinic, or hospital near the workplace, a person or persons must be adequately trained to render first aid. Adequate first aid supplies must be readily available.

Although not required, OSHA has often referred employers to ANSI Z308.1 as a source of guidance for the minimum requirements for first aid kits.

The person who has been trained to render first aid must be able to quickly access the first aid supplies in order to effectively provide injured or ill employees with first aid attention. The first aid supplies should be located in an easily accessible area, and the first aid provider generally should not have to travel through several doorways, hallways and/or stairways to access first aid supplies.

29 CFR 1910.151(b) does not specifically address the placement of first aid kits and/or cabinets based on employee numbers, density, or geography. Therefore, it is the employer’s responsibility to assess the particular needs of the workplace and tailor first aid kits and their placement to the specific needs of the workplace.

The following letter of interpretation was taken from the OSHA website at www.osha.gov. No text has been added or deleted; however we have added line numbers on the left side of the text and we have highlighted certain text sections in yellow for clarification purposes.

1 April 18, 2002

2
3 Mr. John Mateus
4 Less Stress Instructional Services
5 138 Buena Vista Avenue
6 Hawthorne, New Jersey 07506

7
8 Dear Mr. Mateus:

9
10 Thank you for your November 21, 2001 letter to the Occupational Safety and Health
11 Administration's (OSHA's) Directorate of Compliance Programs. You requested clarification of
12 OSHA standard 29 CFR 1910.151 (Medical Services and First Aid). This letter constitutes
13 OSHA's interpretation only of the requirements discussed and may not be applicable to any
14 questions not delineated within your original correspondence. Your questions have been
15 restated below for clarity. We apologize for the delay in your response.

16
17 **Question 1:** How does the ANSI standard Z308.1-1998 relate to 29 CFR 1910.151(b)? In a
18 non-industrial workplace (for example, a corporate office) where employees perform
19 administrative duties and there are no specific employment-related injuries anticipated,
20 would a kit matching the ANSI standard be sufficient for compliance with 29 CFR
21 1910.151(b)?

22
23 **Reply:** Paragraph (b) of 29 CFR 1910.151 requires that in the absence of an infirmary, clinic,
24 or hospital near the workplace, a person or persons must be adequately trained to render
25 first aid. Adequate first aid supplies must be readily available.

26
27 ANSI standards become mandatory OSHA standards only when, and if, they are adopted by
28 OSHA; ANSI Z308.1, *Minimum Requirements for Workplace First Aid Kits*, was not
29 adopted by OSHA. However, ANSI Z308.1 provides detailed information regarding the
30 requirements for first aid kits; OSHA has often referred employers to ANSI Z308.1 as a
31 source of guidance for the minimum requirements for first aid kits.

32
33 The contents of the first aid kit listed in ANSI Z308.1 should be adequate for a small
34 worksite, like the one you describe in your letter. However, larger or multiple operations
35 should consider the need for additional first aid kits, additional types of first aid equipment,
36 and first aid supplies in larger quantities. You may wish to consult your local fire and rescue
37 department, an appropriate medical professional, your local OSHA area office, or a first aid
38 supplier for assistance in putting together a first aid kit which suits the needs of your
39 workplace. You should also periodically assess your kit and increase your supplies as needed.

40
41 **Question 2:** Are there any specific interpretations for the term "readily available"?

42
43 **Reply:** The term "readily available" is not defined in the standard. However, responding in a
44 timely manner can mean the difference between life and death. Therefore, the person who
45 has been trained to render first aid must be able to quickly access the first aid supplies in
46 order to effectively provide injured or ill employees with first aid attention. The first aid
47 supplies should be located in an easily accessible area, and the first aid provider generally
48 should not have to travel through several doorways, hallways and/or stairways to access first
49 aid supplies.

50
51 **Question 3:** Can an employer use the interpretation for "near proximity" (the 3-4 minute
52 and 15 minute standards) for determining the quantity and location for first aid supplies?

53
54 **Reply:** No. The 3-4 minute (life-threatening) and 15-minute (non-life-threatening) time
55 frames to which you refer apply to response and start times to administer first aid,
56 dependent upon the severity of the injury. As an employer would not know in advance

57 whether a life-threatening injury would occur, an employer should **not** use the 15-minute
58 (non-life-threatening) time frame for determining the quantity and location of first aid
59 supplies; however, the 3-4 minute (life-threatening) time frame would be acceptable.

60
61 As stated in Appendix A to 1910.151, the employer should assess the workplace and
62 determine the type, quantity, and location of first aid supplies. In making these
63 determinations, the employer may consider the work process that could cause illness or
64 injury to employees; the types of accidents that have been experienced in the past, as well
65 as those likely to be encountered in the future; and whether employees are exposed to falls,
66 hazardous machinery, or harmful chemicals. (This list is intended to be instructional and is
67 not comprehensive.) After conducting a workplace assessment, the employer will have a
68 better idea of how to address the first aid needs of the workplace.

69
70 **Question 4:** Is there a standard for placing first aid kits and/or cabinets based on employee
71 numbers, density, or geography?

72
73 **Reply:** 29 CFR 1910.151(b) does not specifically address the placement of first aid kits
74 and/or cabinets based on employee numbers, density, or geography. Therefore, it is the
75 employer's responsibility to assess the particular needs of the workplace and tailor first aid
76 kits and their placement to the specific needs of the workplace.

77
78 **Question 5:** What "measuring stick" would an OSHA compliance officer use to determine
79 acceptable first aid supplies for compliance with 29 CFR 1910.151(b)?

80
81 **Reply:** OSHA compliance officers take into consideration a variety of factors when assessing
82 compliance with 29 CFR 1910.151(b). The factors that you mention above are some of the
83 things that a compliance officer evaluates when assessing a first aid kit. We cannot provide a
84 list of "exact requirements" which will apply for every workplace; each workplace must be
85 evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the types of injuries and illnesses that
86 are likely to occur at that workplace.

87
88 **Question 6:** Other than inspection of a site for specific hazards, are there quantitative
89 measurements such as employee-to-kit ratios, time frames within which employees should
90 be able to access supplies, etc.?

91
92 **Reply:** Please see our response to Question 4.

93
94 Thank you for your interest in occupational safety and health. We hope you find this
95 information helpful. OSHA requirements are set by statute, standards and regulations. Our
96 interpretation letters explain these requirements and how they apply to particular
97 circumstances, but they cannot create additional employer obligations. This letter constitutes
98 OSHA's interpretation of the requirements discussed. Note that our enforcement guidance
99 may be affected by changes to OSHA rules. Also, from time to time we update our guidance
100 in response to new information. To keep apprised of such developments, you can consult
101 OSHA's website at <http://www.osha.gov>. If you have any further questions, please feel free
102 to contact the Office of General Industry Compliance Assistance at (202) 693-1850.

103
104 Sincerely,

105
106
107
108 Richard E. Fairfax, Director
109 Directorate of Compliance Programs

What can we take from this Letter of Interpretation?

Based on this very informative letter of interpretation we can make the following educated assumptions:

Line 23 - 25

"Paragraph (b) of 29 CFR 1910.151 requires that in the absence of an infirmary, clinic, or hospital near the workplace, a person or persons must be adequately trained to render first aid. Adequate first aid supplies must be readily available."

The obvious question is "What is considered near the workplace?"
We can continue reading for the answer:

Line 57 - 59

"an employer should **not** use the 15-minute (non-life-threatening) time frame for determining the quantity and location of first aid supplies; however, the 3-4 minute (life-threatening) time frame would be acceptable."

Line 62 - 66

In making these determinations, the employer may consider the work process that could cause illness or injury to employees; the types of accidents that have been experienced in the past, as well as those likely to be encountered in the future; and whether employees are exposed to falls, hazardous machinery, or harmful chemicals.

According to this text, if you can get to the first aid kit and begin administering first aid within 3-4 minutes, you would be in compliance. However, if the process or task is highly hazardous and it is possible to place a first aid kit directly at the hazardous location, we believe it would be prudent to do so.

Regarding travel distances, OSHA does not specify however according to:

Line 46 - 49

"The first aid supplies should be located in an easily accessible area, and the first aid provider generally should not have to travel through several doorways, hallways and/or stairways to access first aid supplies. "

If you are looking for a single formula that defines your need for a first aid kit, travel distance, contents etc., OSHA simply says:

Line 81 - 82

"OSHA compliance officers take into consideration a variety of factors when assessing compliance with 29 CFR 1910.151(b)."

Line 84 - 86

"each workplace must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the types of injuries and illnesses that are likely to occur at that workplace."

However OSHA does offer this advice:

Line 36 - 39

"You may wish to consult your local fire and rescue department, an appropriate medical professional, your local OSHA area office, or a first aid supplier for assistance in putting together a first aid kit which suits the needs of your workplace"