

Guide: Why Every Contractor Should Equip Their Field Workers with First Aid Kits: A Step-by-Step Guide



Section 1: The Importance of Safety in Construction

As a contractor, your top priority should always be the safety and well-being of your field team. Many employers have historically underestimated the importance of preparing for the unexpected, assuming that accidents on job sites are rare, and that safety protocols alone are enough. However, accidents happen—often when you least expect it. Consider a scenario where one of your workers suffers a minor injury, such as a cut on the hand. Without the right supplies to properly clean and treat the injury, what might start as a small issue can turn into a major infection, leading to more costly medical treatment.

Now, think about the possibility of a more severe injury. What if the worker experiences severe bleeding, or the injury occurs in a remote area with no immediate access to medical help? Injuries like these can be life-threatening if not addressed quickly. It's in moments like these that preparedness becomes crucial, and investing in first aid kits for your workers can make all the difference. By proactively equipping your workers with these essential tools, you're reducing the risk of injuries escalating and showing your employees that you value their health and safety. It can also boost morale and retention by providing a secure work environment where employees know they're well cared for.

Section 2: Regulatory Requirements and Potential Fines

OSHA Standard 29 CFR 1926.50 – Medical Services and First Aid

This is the main regulation that governs first aid requirements in construction and other workplaces. It covers the need for employers to provide medical services and first aid supplies to employees on job sites.

- **Availability of First Aid Kits:** Employers must provide first aid supplies that are adequate for the type of work being done and the hazards associated with the job site. The contents of the first aid kit should be based on the specific injuries likely to occur at the job site (e.g., cuts, burns, sprains).

Providing first aid kits for field workers is not just about good practice—it's a regulatory requirement under multiple agencies, including OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). OSHA sets clear standards that govern the provision of first aid kits, outlining requirements for construction sites.

At a minimum, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) also has guidelines for first aid kits (ANSI Z308.1), which set the minimum contents for first aid kits based on the size and nature of the job site. Employees should have access to such as: bandages, scissors, emergency blanket, disposable gloves, alcohol pads, antibacterial ointment, gauze, gauze bandage rolls etc.

Think about the supplies you currently have off site, if there was a major injury such as an amputation, what supplies are in your kit that would help save that life? Do you have a pressure dressing, wound packing, or tourniquet? If so, do have your employees been properly trained on how to use them? Would the scissors in your kit actually work to cut off the type of gear your employee is using?

Important Regulatory Info:

29 CFR 1926.50(a): This regulation mandates that employers must provide adequate first aid supplies based on the hazards present on the job site. Construction employers must ensure that at least one worker trained in first aid is available during working hours, and that first aid kits are readily accessible for use in emergencies.

OSHA's General Duty Clause (Section 5(a)(1)): Even when not explicitly addressed in standards, employers must maintain a safe working environment, which includes providing first aid supplies.

Additional Regulatory Considerations:

- The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) also has guidelines for first aid kits (ANSI Z308.1), which set the minimum contents for first aid kits based on the size and nature of the job site.
- Local regulations or state-specific safety agencies may have additional requirements, so it's essential to stay informed about the applicable rules.

Failure to comply with these regulations can result in hefty fines. According to recent data, OSHA can fine employers up to \$15,000 for failure to comply with basic first aid kit requirements. In cases of willful or repeated violations, fines can increase to as much as \$70,000 per violation.

The top 10 OSHA violations and their corresponding fines for fiscal year 2023:

1. Protection - General Requirements: \$47.4 million in fines with 7,271 violations
2. Hazard Communication: \$5.35 million in fines with 3,213 violations.
3. Ladders: \$9.6 million in fines with 2,978 violation
4. Scaffolding: \$9.64 million in fines with 2,859 violations
5. Powered Industrial Trucks: 2,561 violations
6. Lockout/Tagout: 2,554 violations
7. Respiratory Protection: 2,481 violations
8. Fall Protection - Training Requirements: 2,112 violations
9. Personal Protective and Lifesaving Equipment - Eye and Face Protection: 2,074 violations.
10. Machine Guarding: 1,644 violations

The construction industry received the majority of citations for many of these violations, particularly in fall protection and ladder safety.

It's important to note that the total fines for OSHA's 10 most cited regulations in 2023 amounted to \$132.3 million, which represents a 30% increase from the previous year. In addition, there are several other regulatory agencies that employers are held accountable too.

Other Regulatory Agencies:

The fines and penalties for non-compliance with first aid kit regulations vary significantly depending on the agency and the severity of the violation. Here's a summary of potential consequences:

- **OSHA:** Fines from \$15,625 to \$156,259 per violation, depending on severity.
- **ANSI:** Legal liability, insurance implications, and potential lawsuits.
- **DOT:** Fines ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 for vehicle-related violations.
- **State-Specific OSHA:** Fines ranging from \$2,000 to \$70,000, depending on the state.
- **EPA:** Fines up to \$50,000 per day for hazardous material violations
- **NFPA:** Local fire department fines, typically between \$500 and \$5,000.
- **CDC:** State/local health department fines for infection control violations.

Section 3: The Cost of Injuries (direct and indirect) vs. The Cost of First Aid Kits

While the cost of a first aid kit may seem like a small investment, the costs associated with an injury on a construction site can be astronomical. When injuries occur, the costs go far beyond medical treatment; there are also legal expenses, fines, workers' compensation claims, damage to equipment & property, penalties due to missed deadlines, cost of corrective action/implementation, replacement training if employee doesn't return, and the potential loss of productivity and morale.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics carefully tracks employee injuries (nonfatal and fatal) and work related illnesses. You can visit www.bls.com to view the statistics for your industry to do your own cost/benefit analysis, but in short, based on the sheer volume of work related injuries and the fact that some stats are continuing to rise – providing your employees with first aid kits and training is in everyone's best interest. The employees will feel more committed to work for an employer who truly invests in their safety. It empowers them with the tools, skills and abilities to confidently make the right decisions at the right time!

The Costs of Injuries:

Workers' Compensation: According to the National Safety Council & KPA, the average cost of a workplace injury is \$35,000 - \$42,000 per incident. This includes medical bills, workers' compensation, lost wages, and other associated costs.

Medical Treatment: For severe injuries that require extensive treatment, the cost can easily exceed \$100,000—especially when considering surgeries, rehabilitation, and long-term care. Injuries that results in a fatality can have detrimental outcomes for a business

The Cost of First Aid Kits:

Affordable First Aid Kits:

A well-stocked first aid kit can cost anywhere from \$30 to \$600, depending on the size and complexity. For large companies with a workforce of 50 field workers, the total initial investment would range from \$1,500 to \$18,000—a fraction of the cost of just one serious injury. You would also want to calculate the time allotted for proper training.

Cost Savings:

If each employee has access to a first aid kit, the immediate treatment of minor injuries (cuts, scrapes, burns, etc.) can prevent them from escalating into serious medical conditions that require more costly medical interventions. By having kits readily available and addressing injuries early, the employer not only ensures the well-being of their team but also saves potentially thousands of dollars in medical, legal, and operational costs.

According to KPA, “comparing accident and injury prevention costs with accident costs, doing nothing is far more expensive. A NSC survey showed that every dollar invested in prevention saves \$2 in accident consequences. The NSC also estimates that each prevented injury or illness saves the employer \$37,000, and each prevented fatality saves \$1,390,000. And multiple studies have come to the same conclusion: doing nothing about construction accidents is 200% to 300% more expensive than investing in prevention measures.”

Section 4: Reducing Liability by Providing First Aid Kits

Legal Obligation: Contractors are legally obligated to provide a safe working environment for their employees, and failure to do so can expose them to significant liability. Providing first aid kits is an essential part of mitigating this risk. If an injury occurs and there are no supplies to assist the worker immediately, the employer could be held liable for negligence.

Reducing Legal Risks: By providing first aid kits, contractors demonstrate that they are taking proactive measures to safeguard their workers' health. This can mitigate the risk of lawsuits or claims based on negligence, especially if an employee is injured due to a lack of immediate medical attention.

Promoting Safety Culture: Investing in first aid kits shows employees that their health and well-being matter to the company. This fosters a culture of safety, which not only reduces the likelihood of accidents but can also improve employee morale and retention.

Section 5: The Myths

Before diving into the steps for equipping your team, it's essential to address some common misconceptions that prevent contractors from taking action:

Myth #1: "First aid kits are only necessary for major accidents, and my employees already know how to treat basic injuries."

Many contractors believe that only serious accidents require first aid kits. However, minor injuries like cuts, burns, and sprains are extremely common on job sites. When left untreated, these minor injuries can escalate into infections or more severe conditions. Having a first aid kit readily available allows you to prevent this escalation, saving time, money, and unnecessary stress for both the worker and the employer.

Moreover, while employees may have basic knowledge of first aid, there are legal implications if injuries result in lawsuits. OSHA's 29 CFR 1926.50(c) mandates that in the absence of nearby medical facilities, a person with valid first-aid certification must be present at the worksite to render aid. Proper documentation of training is essential.

Myth #2: "Emergency medical services are always nearby."

Construction sites are often located in remote or congested areas, making immediate access to medical help uncertain. Even in urban settings, waiting for EMS can lead to delays, which may make the difference in an emergency situation. With a first aid kit on hand, your workers can immediately stabilize an injury, improving outcomes until professional medical help arrives. OSHA regulations also require first aid supplies to be accessible on construction sites.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) enforces rules that require first aid kits in commercial vehicles and construction operations. Non-compliance with DOT regulations could result in fines, particularly for companies that use company vehicles for transportation.

Myth #3: "My workers already know how to treat basic injuries."

Although some workers may have first aid knowledge, not all are trained to handle serious injuries. Injuries are unpredictable, and your team needs to be prepared for the unexpected. Providing both training and first aid kits ensures that workers have the necessary resources to act promptly and confidently in an emergency.

These myths can leave your team vulnerable to injury and costly delays. To protect your workers and your bottom line, it's crucial to equip every field worker with a first aid kit.

Myth #4: "I worry that I would be held more liable for having first aid kits. "

While there is some level of liability concern when providing first aid kits to workers, most of these concerns can be addressed through:

- Proper training and certification.
- Regular kit inspections and maintenance.
- Compliance with OSHA and other relevant safety regulations.
- Clear policies and procedures regarding the use of first aid kits.

In fact, providing first aid kits can demonstrate a commitment to worker safety and may reduce the overall risk of injury and liability by enabling quicker and more efficient responses to minor injuries. Let's explore the steps to implement this essential safety measure.

Section 6: Next Steps

Equipping your team with first aid kits is a straightforward but impactful step in improving safety, reducing liability, and boosting employee morale. Here's how you can implement this measure:

Step 1:

Assess Your Current Safety Needs. Each job site has its own unique risks. Assess the specific hazards your workers face, such as heavy machinery, high scaffolding, or extreme weather conditions. The type of first aid kit you need will depend on the environment. For example, if you're working in a remote location, you may need additional supplies such as splints, ice packs, or tourniquets.

Use safety assessment forms (such as OSHA checklists) to identify risks, ensure regulatory compliance, and establish accident prevention procedures. Regular use of these forms will help mitigate hazards, protect workers, and reduce liability.

You can even request a free safety assessment to help you identify health and safety issues without fear of a penalty. <https://laborcommission.utah.gov/divisions/uosh/consultation/>

Step 2: Choose the Right First Aid Kits

A generic first aid kit won't suffice. Choose kits that are comprehensive enough to address the most common injuries on your sites. At a minimum, your kit should include bandages, gauze, antiseptic wipes, scissors, gloves, an emergency blanket, and burn gel. Depending on the specific risks at your site, you may need additional items like splints, triangular bandages, or cold compresses. Ensure that your kits meet OSHA and ANSI standards, and are stored in durable, accessible, and clearly labeled containers.

Step 3: Personalize the Kits for Your Workers

A one-size-fits-all approach isn't ideal for emergencies. Tailor each worker's kit to their role. For instance, power tool operators may need extra supplies for cuts, while those working at heights may need gear for treating falls or sprains. Involve employees in selecting items for their kits—this increases their engagement, ensures the kits are more effective, improves morale and employee retention.

Step 4: Train Your Team

Don't assume that your workers know how to use the contents of the first aid kit. Provide basic first aid training to ensure they understand how to clean wounds, stop bleeding, and manage minor injuries. For more serious emergencies, bring in certified trainers for hands-on demonstrations. Document this training to meet safety protocols.

Step 5: Regularly Check and Restock the Kits

A first aid kit is only effective if it's stocked and accessible. Regularly inspect kits to ensure that supplies haven't expired or been depleted. Make sure they are clearly labeled and easy to locate in an emergency. Implement a system for restocking kits immediately after use to ensure they're always ready for the next emergency.

By following these steps, you'll create a safer work environment, minimize injury-related delays, and demonstrate to your workers that their safety is a top priority. This investment will pay off in improved morale, productivity, and loyalty.

Section 7: Ongoing Support

Safety isn't a one-time effort. To maintain long-term success, consider these strategies:

- **Schedule Regular Safety Audits** Regularly assess the effectiveness of your safety measures. Check if first aid kits are stocked properly and address emerging risks. Involve employees in these audits for valuable feedback.
- **Engage Your Team** Safety should be an ongoing conversation. Make first aid kits and general safety a regular topic at your daily Toolbox Talk meetings. Encourage feedback and teachbacks to ensure kits remain effective, and show workers that their input matters.
- **Stay Updated with Regulations** Regulations evolve over time. Keep up with the latest safety standards and review your first aid kits to ensure compliance with updated rules. Your workers' safety must always be a top priority.

Section 8: Troubleshooting

You may encounter challenges while implementing this plan, but here's how to address them:

Q: What if my workers aren't interested in using the first aid kits?

A: Engage them in the process! Make safety part of your company culture by explaining the importance of first aid kits. When employees feel that their well-being is valued, they'll be more likely to take the initiative.

Q: How much should I spend on a first aid kit?

A: Kits range from \$30 to \$600, depending on their complexity. Focus on getting the essentials and consider customizing kits based on your team's needs. Work with a supplier to find the best solution without overpaying.

Q: What if I'm working in a high-risk environment?

A: If your job site is particularly hazardous, consider specialized kits. Consult with experts like fire departments or first aid consultants to ensure your kits are fully equipped for your specific risks. More advanced trauma kits may be required in some environments. At a minimum make sure there is someone who is BLS certified on the job site during working hours.

By addressing these common challenges proactively, you can ensure that your workers have the necessary resources to stay safe and minimize the risk of injury, improving both their safety and your company's long-term success.

Section 9: Conclusion - Taking Action Today

The financial, emotional, and legal implications of not providing first aid kits to your field workers far outweigh the minimal investment required to equip each worker with a kit. OSHA regulations, ANSI guidelines, and industry standards all underscore the importance of maintaining proper first aid supplies on construction sites. Failure to comply can lead to significant fines, legal action, and potentially disastrous consequences for both the business and its employees.

By providing first aid kits and training workers on their proper use, contractors can reduce the risk of injuries, avoid expensive penalties, and create a safer, more productive work environment. The cost of a first aid kit is a small price to pay compared to the potential costs of an injury or the consequences of non compliance.

Investing in safety today isn't just a regulatory requirement—it's an investment in the future of your business, your employees, and your peace of mind. Take the step now to protect your workers, avoid costly fines, and ensure your job sites are as safe as possible. Your employees and their families—and your bottom line—will thank you.