

Employees Unprepared for Cardiac Emergencies at Work

More than half—56 percent of respondents in a new AHA-commissioned survey—said that they do not know the location of the AED in their workplace.

By Peter Fromm | Sep 01, 2017

Two new surveys commissioned by the American Heart Association have revealed troubling results across key U.S. industries, indicating that employees are very unprepared for medical emergencies in the workplace.

Among the top findings, the surveys found that most American employees have not received cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) training on the job, even though safety managers recognize the importance.

It is a safety issue too big to ignore.

As many as 10,000 cardiac arrests occur annually in the workplace, with the chances of survival at just five to seven percent before emergency medical responders arrive. Immediate intervention can make an enormous difference. A victim receiving CPR from a trained bystander can double or even triple the chances of survival. Those who receive immediate defibrillation have up to a 60 percent survival rate one year after cardiac arrest.

But survey results show that although employees and safety managers alike recognize the value of training, good intentions have failed to translate into comprehensive first aid, CPR+AED employee training.

Lack of Opportunities to Train

The first AHA-commissioned survey targeted 500 general industry/labor employees, a majority in construction or manufacturing. The results underscore the training gap:

- 46 percent report that their employers do not offer any first aid or CPR+AED training whatsoever.
- Just over one-third report having received first aid or CPR+AED training through their current employer.
- 56 percent of respondents said that they do not know the location of the AED in their workplace.
- Finally, more than two in five employees do not feel it necessary to familiarize themselves with the location of AEDs in public areas such as airports and large-scale public venues.

But in one of the most telling results, employees also demonstrated a surprising false sense of security: Despite the reported lack of training, employees believe they or someone in the workplace will know how to perform CPR+AED or first aid in the event of an emergency.

Dr. Michael Kurz, M.D., an AHA volunteer and associate professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine in the Department of Emergency Medicine, said that "the data suggests these untrained employees may be relying on their untrained peers in the event of an emergency."

This results in leaving employees "with a false sense of security that someone in the workplace will be qualified and able to respond, when that is clearly not the case," said Kurz.

Safety Managers and the Value in Training

The second AHA-commissioned survey conducted in February and March of 2017 gathered responses from 1,052 environmental health and safety managers and human resource managers across a variety of industries, including manufacturing and construction.

The good news is that safety managers intrinsically value first aid or CPR+AED training in the workplace:

- 78 percent of managers believe it is "very important" that employees receive the training.
- Another 73 percent say they consider first aid, CPR + AED training equally important as other safety training.
- More than one-third of managers believe more frequent first aid, CPR+AED training would be valuable.
- More than 36 percent also felt it would be valuable to offer training more frequently than the current requirement that stipulates training every two years.

Safety managers also seemed highly aware of the impact of workplace training in and outside of employment hours:

- About one-third of managers reported that a life had been saved both in and outside of the workplace due to proper first aid and CPR+AED training provided by their organization.
- 75 percent reported that injuries or medical conditions were successfully treated in the workplace—and nearly half recalled a situation outside of the workplace—thanks to proper training.

But the decision of when to institute training was worrisome: 33 percent of managers stated that an incident in the workplace contributed to their decision to offer first aid and CPR+AED training. Instead of waiting for a serious incident that demonstrates the need for training, the AHA encourages business to proactively foster a safe work environment, one that empowers employees to assume small social responsibility that can have a large community impact.

If employees want the training and safety managers value it, what accounts for such a significantly under-trained American workforce? One aspect may be gleaned from the employee survey: More than half of the employee respondents feel that, even if an employer offers training, managers need to do a better job of communicating its value internally.

Despite the training gaps, managers believe that training will increase. Two-thirds of managers feel training will become part of a larger culture of safety within organizations. And more than 30 percent are hopeful that attitudes toward training in the workplace are changing overall due to federal and state policy and regulatory requirements and the greater convenience of online training.

A Call to Action and a Powerful Response

As the world's leading voluntary health organization devoted to fighting cardiovascular disease, the AHA sees these survey results as a powerful call to action.

More trained employees will mean thousands of co-workers every year will have an increased chance of surviving a cardiac event in the workplace. But it is also worth noting that employees carry their training home with them, and they will also be prepared to help those outside the workplace. Because more than 350,000 Americans are victims of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest every year, this training will have a potent secondary effect.

"First aid, CPR, and AED training need to become part of a larger culture of safety within workplaces," said Kurz. "We are certainly seeing higher public interest in this training, and we are calling upon decision makers in workplaces and popular public spaces such as arenas, fitness centers, hotels, and churches to place AEDs in the same locations as a fire extinguisher."

Nancy Holland of Kansas City, Mo., is someone who learned firsthand the value of a trained co-worker. She collapsed in January 2015 while at a restaurant in Kansas City, and

employee Richmond Carson responded immediately with CPR. Holland now advocates training and public access to AEDs. Partly because of her advocacy, the law firm at which her husband is a partner installed AEDs in all of the firm's 32 offices nationwide while providing CPR+AED training to all 700 employees.

"Had Richmond not seen the value in being trained, I might not have survived," said Holland. "I can't stress enough how important and empowering these trainings and the availability of AEDs are for people."

Despite Lack of Training, Employees See High Value in Having More

The results from the two American Heart Association surveys provide insights into how U.S.-based industries and employees view the value of emergency training.

In one of the more curious findings, despite the lack of adequate training for responding to a cardiac emergency in the workplace, industry/labor employees nevertheless indicated a strong understanding of its importance and the desire for more.

Among the findings:

- More than 90 percent stated that they believe that first aid and CPR+AED training is important to keep their work environments safe, with 87 percent believing it is simply the right thing to do.
- Those in industry/labor are most likely than other sector respondents to believe that training is critical for their roles, with more than 60 percent saying it is very important.
- And employees overwhelmingly want the training, with 94 percent saying they would take first aid and CPR+AED training if it was offered in the workplace.
- An impressive 70 percent said they would consider taking the training even if it was held outside normal working hours.

About the Author

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