



## Accidents and Emergencies

# Module 1

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Health & Safety  
**Essentials**

Registered charity number 207890

# Introduction and legal framework

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Accidents and emergencies are generally categorised as unplanned events. That doesn't mean they are unforeseen, just that their occurrences are not completely predictable or controllable.

Dealing with them requires a blend of procedures, dynamic risk assessment, experience and carefully practiced activities. Given these reasons in combination with changing circumstances, it is impossible to provide a comprehensive guide detailing what to do in any given situation.

Obviously, it is preferable to try to prevent accidents and emergencies in the first place (see *Health & Safety Essentials – Risk Assessment*; – *COSHH* and – *Laboratory Best Practice*).

Preparation is the key to effective response so it is essential to consider potential emergencies in the risk assessment. This means obtaining, in advance, information about chemical hazard data, appropriate first aid and emergency responses and any spill equipment needed. Remember: the safety data sheet gives detailed advice on how to deal with emergencies involving specific chemicals (see *Health & Safety Essentials – Safety Data Sheets*).

Although the safety data sheet gives general information about possible responses to injuries and emergencies, it will not give you everything you need to know. Careful consideration of the people potentially affected, the work taking place, the scale of operation and the workplace features will all have an impact on your preparations.

## Legal framework

There is no duty to investigate accidents and incidents, but understanding and minimising associated risk factors will reduce the likelihood of similar events occurring. Preparation for and response to accidents and emergencies is referred to both implicitly and explicitly in several regulations, the most general of these being the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations, which require consideration of and planning for 'serious and imminent danger' and 'contact with external services'. Fire safety law contains similar requirements, whilst the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 specify the need for employers to make provision for first aid.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations define accidents and dangerous occurrences that must be reported to the enforcing body (usually the Health & Safety Executive). Additionally, the Environment Agency may require a corresponding notification if the incident is in connection with an environmental hazard; for example the loss of a radioactive source. Events that are notifiable are, in general, are those that have already caused or have the potential to cause significant injury to individuals. There is an expectation by enforcing authorities that an appropriate level of investigation will take place consistent with the seriousness of the event.

Enforcing authorities expect your company to practise procedures to acknowledge potential hazards; an example of this would be the written notification to the Health & Safety Executive when working with dangerous pathogens. Anti-terrorist law also defines stringent preventative measures to deter the theft of substances potentially of use in security threats.

## Sickness and benefit claims

The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1979 require the recording of an accident in an approved BI 510 accident book. This is in addition to the need for your employer to comprehensively record all accidents internally: make sure you know what your employer's procedure is.

In some instances, it may be necessary to make a record of an event on an individual's medical record: this might, for instance, include a needlestick injury where the injured person has been exposed to a particularly hazardous chemical with chronic toxicity.

