

# First Aid for Tree Care Crews

By Ariana Zora Ziminsky

**T**ree care workers regularly face a barrage of bodily dangers – from bee stings and poison ivy to struck-by accidents and falls. “Tree work is a rigorous, demanding job,” reiterates Peter Gerstenberger, TCIA’s senior advisor for safety, compliance and standards. “Little accidents and cuts happen.”

First and foremost, reducing the need for first aid is the best thing. “Locating the site hazards prior to commencement of work in hopes of preventing the need for first aid” is really the first step, stresses Steve Chisholm Sr., president of Aspen Tree Care and chair of TCIA’s Safety Committee. “There are just so many areas that could cause hazards! Proper training is a key element in keeping people from getting hurt.”

Kathryn Shaw, safety director of McCoy Tree Service in Norman, Okla., and vice chair of TCIA’s Safety Committee, echoes that same sentiment, recognizing that in the line-clearance business, there is little room for error when dealing with high-voltage power lines. “Our job is to avoid electrical lines,” she states, quipping, “and – I’m knocking really hard on wood here – that’s exactly what we do!”

Even with thorough training and in-depth hazard analysis, accidents do happen. As testament to that fact, OSHA requires all workplaces to have first aid protocol in place at every work site in the United States. For tree care companies, this translates into having at least one member of each work crew trained in first aid and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

This applies to companies of all sizes – from a one-person show to a nationwide chain. Many tree care companies take it one step further, and make sure that all employees are trained and certified in first aid and CPR.



*A climber uses his personal first aid kit to remove debris from his eye.*

## First aid and CPR training

The Red Cross is probably the most well-known provider of first aid and CPR training. The Red Cross First Aid certificate (which is valid for three years before recertification is required) requires only four course hours. It covers treatment for injuries such as recognizing and caring for bleeding, wounds, sudden illness, as well as how to properly immobilize muscle, bone and joint injuries.

Adult CPR training (valid for one year) handles “recognizing and caring for breathing and cardiac emergencies in adults” and “handling emergency situa-

tions until advanced medical help can take over.”

Both certifications are commonly combined into one class, called “Standard First Aid,” which also includes the role of automated external defibrillators (AEDs). AEDs are emerging as life-saving devices that can be used if a victim suffers from sudden cardiac arrest.

AED units can run about \$1,200 to \$4,500 (depending which extras are purchased along with it), according to Michael Gagnon, who is in charge of Health and Safety Services at the Concord, N.H., chapter of the American Red Cross. The

price of AEDs has dropped over the last five years, Gagnon explains, but it is hard to predict whether they will drop below a thousand dollars anytime soon.

Nevertheless, it is still something tree care companies can start to think about. "We're going to have our people trained in (AED) next year," predicts Chisholm. "It's actually a pretty good program, from what we've seen." Having been advised that the price of AEDs is likely to continue to come down in the next few years, Chisholm sees the life-saving device as a definite option later on down the road.

For those companies seeking to get first aid and CPR training, there are three main ways that the American Red Cross – with chapters all across the country – trains people: through community classes at community locations; on-site at a company's own facility; or through "authorized providers" who, after special training by

the Red Cross, can then train others in first aid and CPR. The second option – training on-site at the company's office – is the most common option, according to Gagnon.

"We can schedule a class based on a client's needs," he says, adding that even third-shift classes are doable if that's what works for the employees.

### First aid kits

The tree care crew's first aid kit should be as readily available to workers as, say, a gallon of drinking water on a 90-degree day. According to OSHA's Standard 1910.151(b): "In the absence of an infirmary, clinic or hospital in near proximity to the workplace (that) is used for the treatment of all injured employees, a person or persons shall be adequately trained to render first aid. Adequate first aid supplies shall be readily available."

OSHA calls upon ANSI Z308.1 to address the details of what a first aid kit should contain, and how it should be properly maintained. Although OSHA has not officially adopted the standard, it states in an April 18, 2002, interpretation that "ANSI Z308.1 provides detailed information regarding the requirements for first aid kits; OSHA has often referred employers to ANSI Z308.1 as a source of guidance for the minimum requirements for first aid kits."<sup>1</sup>

This ANSI standard includes a list of eight basic items for first aid kits in all industries; outlines how the kits should be constructed and stored (depending on the industry they will be used in); and, perhaps most importantly, emphasizes that all first aid kits must address the needs of the industry they are being used in.

"The required contents and the optional contents (suggested in ANSI Z308.1) ...

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A mirror, gauze, tweezers and cotton swabs are often part of a climber's personal first aid kit.

are a surface scratch of the types of products that are out there, and in order to have a complete and effective kit, you need to do a complete and thorough workplace analysis," according to Christine Fargo, of the International Safety Equipment Association, the secretariat for the ANSI Z308.1.

The standard, she emphasizes, is a starting point for first aid kits – "to give people a little more of a thinking spur" – and to reiterate the need for a hazard analysis and worksite evaluation.

The standards items recommended in ANSI Z308.1 apply to all industries, and include an absorbent compress, adhesive bandages, adhesive tape, antiseptic, burn treatment, medical exam gloves, sterile pads and triangular bandage. The standard also has a list of recommended items, including an antibiotic treatment, breathing barrier, burn dressing and eye wash.

ANSI Z308.1 also requires proper labeling of products so each item in the kit is easily identifiable.

Although it's relatively common to remember to include Band-Aids and gauze in your first aid kit, it's worthwhile to take note of what you might need most as a tree care worker – and make sure those items are always available.

At Lewis Tree Service, common minor ailments from the job include scrapes, poison ivy and minor debris in the eye. Dan Oberlies, vice president for risk management at Lewis, notes that all the company's trucks have eyewash bottles.

"We have, at times, had to use a first aid kit to come to someone's aid before medical personnel arrived," Oberlies adds, "but that is infrequent."

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son ivy, Shaw (of McCoy Tree Service) swears by Tecnu, a skin cleanser that washes off the urushiol oil from poison ivy leaves. "If you get poison ivy taken care of in advance, then you end up not having to go to a doctor with it," Shaw emphasizes.

Another thing to consider is first aid requirements for pesticide application. "For pesticide loading and handling crews, we have a good (more than just a basic) eyewash kit," relates Lauren Lanphear, president and owner of Forest City Tree Protection Co., Inc., in Cleveland, Ohio.

"We have some basic kits for granular or particles that might get in the eye," he explains, "but if you're doing something with a lot of dust..." even the best pair of goggles might still let fine particles get in.

Other options that tree workers may find handy are first aid kits that latch onto your climbing saddle and can be

## Basic items for a first aid kit

Eight basics (from ANSI Z308.1-2003)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. absorbent compress</li> <li>2. adhesive bandages</li> <li>3. adhesive tape</li> <li>4. antiseptic</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. burn treatment</li> <li>6. medical exam gloves</li> <li>7. sterile pad</li> <li>8. triangular bandage</li> </ol>
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Additional suggested items for the tree care industry (compiled from various sources)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>antihistamine tablets</li> <li>barrier cream for poison ivy control (such as Stokogard)</li> <li>blood-borne pathogens kit (rubber gloves, rubber aprons, goggles)</li> <li>burn ointment</li> <li>CPR barrier</li> <li>eyewashes</li> <li>first aid blanket (treat for shock)</li> <li>list of emergency numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>money/change (for phone calls or emergency items)</li> <li>scissors</li> <li>snake bite kits</li> <li>sunscreen</li> <li>Tecnu to wash off poison ivy oils</li> <li>tourniquet</li> <li>treatment for insect bites and bee stings</li> <li>tweezers</li> <li>wire splint</li> </ul>
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used while a climber is in a tree; snake bite kits; and treatments for allergy symptoms – especially bee stings, which can trigger a life-threatening, suffocating allergic reaction.

### Maintaining first aid standards

By now you are thinking either, "I've got that first aid stuff all in place!" or, "I've got to get my first aid supplies together!"

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