TOOLBOX TALK #46

AEDs IN THE WORKPLACE

An automated external defibrillator is a device used to treat victims of sudden cardiac arrest (SCA). SCA occurs when the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops beating, interrupting blood flow and oxygen to the heart and brain. It's the leading cause of death in the US and can occur at any time – even in people believed to be healthy. In fact, SCA affects more than 1000 people each day in the US – more than 40 people an hour. On average, only 10% of individuals who suffer cardiac arrest outside of the hospital survive, but the survival rate jumps to 38% when victims are treated with CPR and defibrillators. That's why the American Heart Association has made early defibrillation an integral part of the basic life support chain of survival for treating patients in cardiac arrest.

How to help

The two key components to helping a victim of SCA are:

- CPR to restore blood flow to the brain and heart.
- An electrical shock from a defibrillator to stop the heart's erratic beating and help enable it to restore its normal rhythm.

If you witness someone experiencing SCA, call 911 and immediately initiate CPR. Have a bystander quickly bring the closest AED. With average emergency medical service response times at 7 to 12 minutes, every minute is critical. Starting CPR right away can help save the victim's life. When the AED is turned on, it will prompt the rescuer with instructions. Monitoring pads placed on the patient's bare chest enable the device to measure the patient's heart rhythm and determine if an electrical shock is needed. A shock will not restart the heart – it simply stops the erratic electrical activity and helps the heart's natural pacemakers restore its normal rhythm. Not every victim will need a defibrillating shock, and not all heart rhythms are "shockable", but high-quality CPR can potentially convert a non-shockable rhythm into one that is shockable. Even if this isn't possible, high-quality CPR will provide the heart with desperately needed oxygenated blood until EMS arrives.

AEDs can mean the difference between life and death

Public access to AEDs is critical to help save lives. Most AEDs are simple enough for anyone to use in an emergency. They should be located in public places where people gather, highly visible and easily accessible. Time is of the essence when helping a victim of SCA, so AEDs should never be locked away or hidden from view. Do you know where the AEDs are on your jobsite? Have you taken a class in CPR? How can you play a role in ensuring more AEDs are readily available?