

Back To Work[®]

P.O. BOX 67, BASINGSTOKE, HAMPSHIRE, RG24 8YG. UK.
UK Tel: 01256 351080 International Tel: +44 1256 351080

Natural Medicine Consultants & Tutors - Ergonomic Back Care Advisory Services - Health Care Products



www.backtowork.co.uk

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To whom it may concern.
This is an open letter.
The original was sent to the
Executive Council of a
Professional Therapy Organisation

Dear Council Members,

An Observation of First Aid Training

There is no doubt that any therapist should have knowledge of what to do in the case of an emergency. Many therapists work independently and would have to cope with any emergency situation as it presented itself.

During my time serving on the Executive Council/Committees of Aromatherapy Organisations I was asked if I would put together a First Aid Course that would be particularly relevant for therapists. With my background in First Aid training and Ambulance Service experience this is something I would be qualified to do.

As I have previously tutored on Health and Safety Executive (HSE) First Aid at Work (FAW) courses, I am aware that the content of these courses is strictly controlled. In the preparation for a therapist focussed course, I felt it would be beneficial for me to update my knowledge on the content of official FAW courses and their current guidelines for first aid training in general. In particular, my interest was in the shorter courses known as Appointed Person (AP) or Emergency Aid (EA).

It has been suggested in the past that therapists should take the FAW level of training from one of the 1200 HSE-approved providers, the assumption being that it is at a high level of knowledge. However, the strictly limited content may not be the best solution for therapists. In fact, I was very surprised at the limited content now required for the 2006 FAW courses.

The HSE FAW course is primarily designed for the First Aid personnel in a place of employment, probably with a First Aid Room, often in a controllable environment with assistance available from colleagues and the assumed availability of ambulance attendance within a reasonable time frame. Many FAW first aid personnel will be laypersons, with little or no medical knowledge and, apart from organized training and exercises within their employment, they may not have to practice the skills taught on the FAW course.

This reality, along with the need to simplify guidelines to laypersons, has been recognized by the Resuscitation Council UK and the HSE. This has resulted in the content of FAW courses being dramatically reduced.

Conversely, the AP or EA first aid courses are not controlled or approved by the HSE. In the HSE booklet HSG212 (The training of first aid at work – A guide to gaining and maintaining HSE approval), *Appendix 2, Related Training*, states :

'Appointed person/emergency aid training

1 This is not a statutory requirement and a HSE FAW-approved organisation must *not* state, verbally or in writing, that this type of training is a legal requirement. Equally, any certificates issued must not state or imply that this training is HSE-approved.'

The HSE do give recommendations on the minimum time and the suggested content for these courses, but no restriction is placed on the provider as to what can be included. Therefore, additional relevant information, that would benefit the particular student group, can be included in the training, perhaps focussed towards the particular needs of the end users.

I have observed that there is some confusion regarding these short courses, often presented over one day. I am concerned that committee members of professional organisations should be fully aware of the facts in this matter in order to make informed decisions.

Unfortunately, there have been examples of FAW Approved training services advertising a one day first aid course as HSE Approved. In July 2006, I discussed this with the HSE First Aid Approvals and Monitoring section and they advise me "Appointed Persons (AP) and Emergency Aid (EA) courses are most definitely not approved by them". The only HSE-approved courses are the FAW and the FAW requalification courses. FAW courses last for at least 24 hours of training, usually held over four days or spread over several weeks. Requalification courses are of at least 12 hours training and are normally held over two days.

The HSE advised me that HSE-approved providers are contravening their approval conditions by even suggesting their AP/EA courses are 'Approved' and they will take action to stop any organisation promoting courses in this way.

This has been an interesting exercise and I hope it has been helpful to Council in understanding the benefits of the shorter Emergency Aid courses and avoiding any misinformation on this matter.

Yours sincerely

David Tagg
August 2006