

Consider the following facts from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):

- There are 300,000-400,000 deaths per year in the United States from cardiac arrest;
- Most cardiac arrest deaths occur outside the hospital;
- Current out-of-hospital survival rates are only 1 to 5 percent;
- Every minute the heart is stopped, the likelihood of death increases by 10 percent;
- The average response time for emergency providers is nine minutes; and
- The chance that someone will die of cardiac arrest in nine minutes is about 90 percent.

With this in mind, the leaders of many businesses, organizations, public entities, schools, and churches are becoming more proactive in attempting to save lives. While many of these facilities have people who are trained in CPR, many of them also have recently become interested in Automated External Defibrillators (AED) to help save even more lives. Many religious organizations see this as an extension of the ongoing care they give to their staff, congregation members, and visitors.

AEDs administer an electric shock to the heart. Built-in computers assess the patient's heart rhythm, decide if defibrillation is necessary, and then administer a shock. If the patient does not need a shock, the machine will make that determination and will not defibrillate.

The growing popularity of these units is attributed to their small size, ease of use, and that they are designed for use by non-medical personnel. Because there is a slight chance that the machine will not respond correctly, it is important that those operating the device be thoroughly trained. It also is important to regularly inspect and maintain the units.

Many people are concerned with the liability of using an AED, but because of the "Good Samaritan" law that exists in every state, most of those concerns are unfounded. This law states that a person who renders care or assistance at the scene of an emergency and does not expect compensation is not liable for any civil damages that may result from providing care.

Most AED units cost around \$3,000. If your organization is considering purchasing an AED, the following steps should be considered:

- ❑ Consult a local physician, as the units may only be purchased with a prescription;
- ❑ Train all users in CPR and AED operation;
- ❑ Notify your local fire department or Emergency Medical Service (EMS) provider that you have purchased a unit;
- ❑ Place the unit in a location that is easily accessible;
- ❑ Educate congregation members on who will be allowed to use the unit;
- ❑ Document any usage of the AED; and
- ❑ Have a physician oversee the program.

Ensuring the protection of your organization should be a top priority. The proper steps and programs to help churches and religious organizations fulfill this mission must be considered. Before launching any new program, especially those related to life saving techniques, it is important that training and supervision are part of the process. In addition, a plan for proper follow-up, maintenance, and documentation should be put in place before the program is rolled-out.