

BUYING, USING & MAINTAINING A FIRE EXTINGUISHER

Maintenance

Extinguishers require routine care. Read your operator's manual and check the condition of the extinguisher every month. Shake your dry chemical extinguisher to get the powder evenly dispersed since the powder has a tendency to cake. Have the extinguisher serviced once a year by a fire extinguisher company, which you can find in the yellow pages under "Fire Extinguishers."

Reusable models must be recharged after every use. Sometimes the powder will lodge in the valve assembly after one use and the pressure will bleed off even though your pressure gauge shows pressure is remaining. A partially discharged unit might as well be empty.

Disposable fire extinguishers can be used only once. They must be replaced after one use. Disposable extinguishers usually do not have a pressure gauge and rely on a button to let you know if pressure is still good. The label will tell you if the extinguisher is rechargeable.

Each extinguisher should be installed in plain view near an escape route where

you can reach it if there's a fire, and away from potential fire hazards such as kitchen stoves, wood stoves, and heaters.

Buy extinguishers carefully

A fire extinguisher must bear the seal of an independent testing laboratory. It should also be labeled as to the type of fire it is intended to extinguish. Many extinguishers are multi-purpose for more than one class of fire. The extinguishers provided in most buildings are classified for A, B, and C fires.

Classification of Fires

There are three basic classifications of portable fire extinguishers.

Class A fires involves ordinary combustibles such as wood, paper, rubber, cloth, most plastics, etc. Almost everything in your home is considered a Class A combustible.

Class B fires involve combustible and flammable liquids and gases, such as gasoline, kerosene, grease, tar, acetone, fingernail polish, some household cleaning products, etc. Some plastics

melt first, then burn just like a flammable liquid.

Class C fires involve anything with energized electricity. Once the electrical power is taken away, the fire goes back to being a Class A or B fire.

Extinguishers are also rated according to the amount of fire that can be extinguished. The minimum rating for most occupancies is 2-A:10-B:C. The 2-A means the extinguisher will extinguish as much fire as a 2-1/2 gallon water extinguisher on ordinary combustibles (about as much as a trash can would hold). The 10-B relates to the amount of fire involving flammable liquids, usually ten square feet. The C means the extinguisher's agent is non-conductive. The rating is found where the Underwriters Laboratory mark is located, usually on the back or side label, along with the type of extinguisher (i.e., Dry Chemical Fire Extinguisher). Look for the rating just below the type.

Extinguishers are a first line of defense.

When used properly, a portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the Fire Department arrives.



Extinguishers have their limits.

Portable extinguishers, however, are not designed to fight a large or spreading fire. Even against small fires, they are useful under only the right conditions:

- The extinguisher must be rated for the type of fire at hand.
- The extinguisher must be large enough to put out the fire.
- Most portable extinguishers discharge their extinguishing agents in as little as eight seconds.
- The extinguisher must be within easy reach and in working order, ready for use and fully charged.
- You must know how to use the extinguisher.
- There is no time to read directions during an emergency.
- The operator must be strong enough to lift and operate the extinguisher.

OPERATION

Extinguishers have a label on the front with operating instructions.

The operating principle is the same for all extinguishers - **PASS**:

Pull the pin - Extinguishers have a safety mechanism to prevent the extinguisher from being accidentally discharged. Usually the safety mechanism involves a pin held in place by a plastic tie. Since the plastic may stretch before breaking or may be difficult to break, twisting the pin first will break the tie easily.

Aim - Aim at the base of the fire at the fuel. Aiming at the fire does no good, since the fire is only the products of combustion coming off the fuel.

Squeeze - Squeeze the two parts of the handle to operate the valve and discharge the extinguishing agent.

Sweep - Sweep the extinguishing agent rapidly back and forth to cover all of the fuel and separate the fuel from the fire. In the case of flammable liquid fires, technique is very important. The bigger the fire,

the more chance the fire will flash back because of the heated vapors.

Should you fight the fire?

Before you begin to fight a small fire:

- Make sure everyone has left, or is leaving, the building.
- Make sure the Fire Department has been called.

911



Never fight a fire if *even one* of the following is true:

- ✓ The fire is spreading fast or is already a large fire.
- ✓ The fire could block your escape route.
- ✓ You are untrained in the proper operation of the extinguisher.
- ✓ You don't know whether the extinguisher is designed for the type of fire at hand or is large enough to fight the fire.

To fight a fire with an extinguisher in any one of these cases is reckless. Instead, leave immediately, close off the area, and leave the fire to the fire fighters.