Understanding and Using A Fire Extinguisher


Studies show that from the time a fire starts, a person has less than four minutes to escape the overcoming effects of smoke, poisonous gases or superheated air. A fire extinguisher is your best defense against small, contained fires that have just begun to burn. Extinguishers can control flames until the fire department arrives, and buy you enough time to get out of a burning structure.

What's Your Type of Fire Extinguisher?

Every type of extinguisher is designed to fight a certain class or classes of fire. There are four classes which are determined by the type of fuel. Learning to identify these classes will help you select the right fire extinguisher. Using the wrong type of fire extinguisher can cause a fire to spread and place you in greater danger.

Type A extinguishers fight ordinary combustibles such as burning wood, cloth, paper, rubber, upholstery and plastics.

Type B extinguishers fight flammable liquids, gases and greases such as oils, paints and gasoline.

Type C extinguishers fight energized electrical fires such as burning wires, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery and appliances.

Type D extinguishers are used on fires caused by combustible metals such as magnesium, sodium, potassium and aluminum. This type of extinguisher must match the type of metal that is burning for safety and maximum effectiveness. A list of metals that match the unit's extinguishing agent should be on the label.

There are also multipurpose fire extinguishers that can be used on type A, B and C classes of fire.

Here are the most common types of fire extinguishers:

- Water extinguishers or APW extinguishers (air-pressurized water) are suitable for class A fires only. Never use a water extinguisher on grease fires, electrical fires or class D fires - the flames will spread and make the fire bigger! Water extinguishers are filled with water and pressurized with oxygen. Again - water extinguishers can be very dangerous in the wrong type of situation. Only fight the fire if you're certain it contains ordinary combustible materials only.
- **Dry chemical** extinguishers come in a variety of types and are suitable for a combination of **class A, B and C fires**. These are filled with foam or powder and pressurized with nitrogen.
  - **BC** - This is the regular type of dry chemical extinguisher. It is filled with sodium bicarbonate or potassium bicarbonate. The BC variety leaves a mildly corrosive residue which must be cleaned immediately to prevent any damage to materials.

**ABC** - This is the multipurpose dry chemical extinguisher. The ABC type is filled with monoammonium phosphate, a yellow powder that leaves a sticky residue that may be damaging to electrical appliances such as a computer. Dry chemical extinguishers have an advantage over CO2 extinguishers since they leave a non-flammable substance on the extinguished material, reducing the likelihood of re-ignition.

**To meet foster care licensing standards, you should have at least one fully charged fire extinguisher (2A:10BC dry chemical fire extinguisher) strategically located on each level of the house.**

**What's the PASS?**

**To use an extinguisher safely**, stand six to eight feet from the fire with your back to an unblocked exit and use the PASS procedure:

- **P**ull the safety pin at the top of the extinguisher. (Some units have latches or levers instead.)
- **A**im the nozzle, horn or hose at the base of the flames. Hold the extinguisher vertically to ensure the unit will have enough pressure.
- **S**queeze or press the handle to release the extinguishing agent. Contents empty fast.
- **S**weep from side to side at the base of the fire and at least six inches past the edges of the flames until completely extinguished.

A typical fire extinguisher contains 10 seconds of extinguishing power. This could be less if it has already been partially discharged. Always read the instructions that come with the fire extinguisher beforehand and become familiarized with its parts. It is highly recommended by fire prevention experts that you get hands-on training before operating a fire extinguisher. Most local fire departments offer this service.

Once the fire is out, don't walk away! Watch the area for a few minutes in case it reignites. Recharge the extinguisher immediately after use.
Keep in a Location Near You

Keep extinguishers close to high-traffic areas, in easy-to-access locations. Place extinguishers on wall brackets no higher than five feet from the floor. Install them near exists and hazard areas. Keep one on each level of the dwelling, in the garage, and near the doors of furnace and mechanical rooms.

It's About Time

Acting fast can make the difference between and small fire and one that consumes your whole building. Before fighting a fire, be certain that everyone has been alerted to the fire and is leaving the building, and that the fire department has been called. Fight the fire only if the fire is small and contained, a correct type of extinguisher is within easy reach, and you are near a clear exit in case you need to escape.

Ready for Inspection

After each use, service rechargeable units and replace disposable models immediately. Check pressure gauges and carbon dioxide containers monthly. Inspect all containers on a regular basis looking for damage, corrosion or tampering. Make sure extinguishers are easy to remove from hooks or wall brackets. Maintain inspection records of usage and service. Records are helpful after a fire to prove to insurance companies that extinguishers were all serviced and in working order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire Safety First!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Practice fire prevention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Install and maintain fire extinguishers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn to operate extinguishers properly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remember that extinguishers have limits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• When in doubt, get out and leave the firefighting to the professionals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>