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Fire Extinguishers

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Supervising Safety Newsletter

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Organization (OSHA), no one at a workplace should use a fire extinguisher unless he/she has been trained to do so. All IPSC employees are required to be trained annually on how to properly use a fire extinguisher. Fire extinguishers are meant to be used on small fires that are in the beginning stages or incipient phase and protect evacuation routes. Whenever you see smoke or a fire, use personal judgement to determine if you should attempt to extinguish it. One of the first things to do when encountering a fire is sound the alarm by notifying the Control Room, contacting the local Fire Department, or calling the emergency number 2-911 (or 911 at home). Anyone attempting to extinguish a fire with an extinguisher should ask themselves these important questions:

- Is the fire small enough to be safely extinguished by an extinguisher?
- What type of material is burning?
- What is the location of the nearest fire extinguisher?
- Is there an escape route if something goes wrong?

Different types of fires require different types of fire extinguishers. Most fire extinguishers display pictures or symbols to indicate what kind of fire they are to be used for. The best recommendation for your home is a multi-purpose extinguisher that is large enough to effectively put out a small fire, but not so heavy that it is difficult to handle in an emergency. In commercial and industrial settings many different types of extinguishers are available and are often large and cumbersome. These commercial extinguisher applications are generally oversized and paired for the environments they are to be used.

		Ordinary Combustibles	Wood, Paper, Cloth, Etc.
		Flammable Liquids	Grease, Oil, Paint, Solvents
		Live Electrical Equipment	Electrical Panel, Motor, Wiring, Etc.
		Combustible Metal	Magnesium, Aluminum, Etc.
		Commercial Cooking Equipment	Cooking Oils, Animal Fats, Vegetable Oils

The most common types that will be seen in homes and industry is the multi-purpose ABC or BC fire extinguisher. These are usually a dry chemical powder extinguisher that covers ordinary combustibles, flammable liquids, and live electrical equipment. There are other ABC extinguisher options available, such as gas extinguishing agents like Halon or Cleanguard that displace the oxygen to suppress a fire. These extinguishers are very effective but usually carry a high price tag. Many of the extinguishers at IPSC are either multi-purpose, dry chemical, or Cleanguard. The existing Halon extinguishers are being

replaced with the newer Cleanguard gas due to environmental concerns.

How Long Do Extinguishers Last?

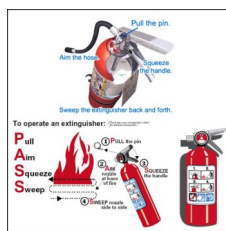
Depending on the type of extinguisher, it could last anywhere from five to twelve years if handled correctly. Extinguishers should be protected from freezing and extreme temperatures to ensure proper function. Monthly inspections should be conducted, checking the gauge and agitating the chemical to maintain fluidity. When selecting an extinguisher, look for one that is UL rated and refillable. Extinguishers will last longer when properly serviced and maintained. There are many extinguishers that are not serviceable and only last five to ten years.

Does Size Matter?

When selecting an extinguisher size does matter. Select an extinguisher that is big enough for your needs, but not so cumbersome that no one can lift or maneuver it. Manufacturers also rate their extinguishers by weight, range of spray, and discharge time when fully depressed. The range and discharge time usually increase as the extinguisher gets larger, but the discharge time is only measured in seconds. Every second counts when fighting a fire!

PASS

Remember the basics and follow the PASS acronym.



Things to Remember

Whenever issued a hot work permit for a job, always mark the fire watch box. This means watching the area for thirty minutes following work to ensure that a fire does not ignite. The location of an extinguisher should be nearby and readily accessible to all work areas, or a portable extinguisher should be acquired through the tool room. Whether at home or at work, make sure other people have exited the area and the Fire Department and Control Room have been called before attempting to use a fire extinguisher. Extinguishers should be placed near exits or in areas of high fire danger, so you can easily escape if the fire gets out of control or the room fills with smoke.

We should all be prepared and take our training seriously each year. Each of us should take the steps to protect our homes and families by investing in fire protection equipment, teaching our families how to stay safe, and call for help in an emergency.