

LOSS CONTROL BULLETIN

Fire Extinguisher Safety and Use

Fact: According to the National Fire Protection Agency, 1,451,500 fires were reported in the United States during 2008. This astonishing number resulted in \$15.5 billion in property damages according to the National Fire Protection Agency.

A fire can be a devastating loss to anyone. A portable fire extinguisher, however, can help save lives and property by putting out small fires. Knowing the types of fire extinguishers, their maintenance, and how to use them correctly is essential.

Types of Fires & Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are categorized by five different classes of fire. Each class may have several different types of fire extinguishers that could be used in the event of a fire. However, it is important to realize that one type of extinguisher is not appropriate to use in every situation. Check your fire extinguisher for classification labels indicating against which class of fire it is best used.

- **Class A** fires involve mainly combustible materials such as wood, paper, cloth, and trash.
- **Class B** fires involve flammable liquids such as gasoline, oils, and certain types of paints.
- **Class C** fires involve energized electrical equipment such as appliances, motors, and wiring.
- **Class D** fires involve combustible metals such as titanium, sodium, or magnesium.
- **Class K** fires involve cooking oils such as grease, animal fats, and vegetable fats.
- Know when to go. Fire extinguishers are one element of a fire response plan, but the primary element is safe escape. Every household should have a home fire escape plan and working smoke alarms.

Inspection and Maintenance

Proper maintenance should be followed. Be sure that you consult the owner's guide or manual for your fire extinguisher. Here are some general tips:

- Make sure that the fire extinguisher is not obstructed from view and is easily accessible.
- Verify that the fire extinguisher's pressure gauge shows that the extinguisher has adequate pressure.

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- A brief inspection of the fire extinguisher should take place at least once a month, and a licensed fire protection company should inspect the extinguisher on an annual basis. (National Fire Protection Agency)

How to Properly Use a Fire Extinguisher

First: Your main priorities are making sure everyone is out of the building and that someone has contacted the local fire department.

If you are in the position where you feel that you can safely extinguish a small fire, remember the word **P.A.S.S.** (National Fire Protection Agency):

- **P**ull the pin from the extinguisher.
- **A**im the fire extinguisher low, pointing towards the base of the fire.
- **S**queeze the handle or lever slowly and evenly.
- **S**weep the nozzle of the fire extinguisher from side to side towards the base of the fire.

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