

Fire Extinguishers and Fire Safety

A portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives, but with so many fire extinguishers to choose from, selecting the proper one for your home can be a daunting task. Everyone should have at least one fire extinguisher at home, but it's just as important to ensure you have the proper type of fire extinguisher. Fire protection experts recommend one for the kitchen, the garage and workshop.

Fire extinguishers are divided into categories, based on different types of fires. The following is a quick guide to help choose the right type of extinguisher for your home.

- **Class A** extinguishers are for ordinary combustible materials such as paper, wood, cardboard, and most plastics. **Never use a Class A extinguisher to put out a Class B or C fire.**
- **Class B** fires involve flammable or combustible liquids such as gasoline, kerosene, grease and oil.
- **Class C** fires involve electrical equipment, such as appliances, wiring, circuit breakers and outlets. Never use water to extinguish class C fires - the risk of electrical shock is far too great!

Most fire extinguishers sold for home use are multipurpose, meaning they are rated to extinguish multiple classes of fire, for example an ABC rated extinguisher. **It is vital to know what type of extinguisher you are using. Using the wrong type of extinguisher for the wrong type of fire can be life-threatening.**

Before deciding to fight a fire, be certain that:

- You call 911 to report the fire, no matter how small the fire may be.
- The fire is small and not spreading. A fire can double in size within two or three minutes.
- You have the proper type of fire extinguisher for what is burning.
- The fire won't block your exit if you can't control it. A good way to ensure this is to always keep the exit at your back.
- You know your fire extinguisher works. Inspect extinguishers once a month for dents, leaks or other signs of damage. Assure the pressure is at the recommended level. On extinguishers equipped with a gauge, the needle should be in the green zone - not too high and not too low. You know how to use your fire extinguisher. There's not enough time to read instructions when a fire occurs.

To operate a fire extinguisher, remember the word PASS:

- **P**ull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you, and release the locking mechanism.
- **A**im low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.
- **S**queeze the lever slowly and evenly.
- **S**weep the nozzle from side-to-side.

Never Fight A Fire If:

- **The fire is spreading rapidly.** Only use a fire extinguisher when the fire is small and confined to a small area, such as a wastebasket. If the fire is already spreading quickly, evacuate and call the fire department.
- **You don't know what is burning.** Unless you know what is burning, you won't know what type of fire extinguisher to use. Even if you have an ABC extinguisher, there could be something that will explode or produce highly toxic smoke.
- **You don't have the proper fire extinguisher.** The wrong type of extinguisher can be dangerous or life-threatening.
- **There is too much smoke or you are at risk of inhaling smoke.** Seven out of ten fire-related deaths occur from breathing poisonous gases produced by the fire.

Don't forget, fire extinguishers aren't made to do the job of a firefighter. Only use a portable fire extinguisher when the fire is confined to a small area, such as a wastebasket, and is not growing; everyone has exited the building; the fire department has been called or is being called; and the room is not filled with smoke. If a fire is too hot or starting to spread--get out of the house!

For additional fire safety information, view the DRI Fire Prevention Plan available on the EH&S webpage.

Sources:

<http://www.nfpa.org/itemDetail.asp?categoryID=277&itemID=18264&URL=Safety%20Information/For%20consumers/Fire%20Extinguishers>

<http://www.fire-extinguisher101.com/tips.html>

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