

Fire Extinguishers: When, How and Which Ones to Use



A fire extinguisher is your best defense against small, contained fires that have just started. Extinguishers are not meant to supplement the fire department, they are only meant to control flames until the fire department arrives, or buy enough time to get you out of the burning structure. In order for a fire extinguisher to be used to its full potential, you must learn which type to use, and how to use it correctly.

Classification of Fuels

There are several types of fire extinguishers; each one is designed to fight a certain class, or classes of fire. There are four classes of fire, each is determined by the type of fuel for which might burn. Your knowledge of these classes will help you to decide which is the appropriate type of extinguisher. Not all extinguishers can put out the same type of fire, using the wrong type can cause the fire to spread, and could place you in greater danger.



Type A extinguishers fight ordinary combustibles such as wood, cloth and paper.



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



Type C extinguishers fight *energized* electrical equipment including wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery and appliances.



Type K extinguishers fight vegetable or animal oils and fats. This is a relatively new classification and they are commonplace in commercial kitchens. Can also be used to fight a Class A fire if symbol is listed.

Location, Location, Location...

The placement of your extinguisher is another important aspect. They should be placed in highly accessible, high-traffic locations. Mount extinguishers on wall brackets no higher than five feet from the floor to the top of the extinguisher. Place them in hazardous areas, and near exits.

Do You Know the P.A.S.S. Word?

To use a fire extinguisher safely, stand six to eight feet from the fire and use the **PASS** procedure.

Pull - Pull the pin. This will unlock to extinguisher and allow you to discharge it.

Aim - Aim the nozzle, horn or hose at the base of the flames.

Squeeze - Squeeze the lever above the handle to release the extinguishing agent. Releasing the lever will stop the discharge.

Sweep - Sweep from side to side moving carefully toward the fire, and keep the extinguisher aimed at the base of the flames, until the fire is extinguished.

Servicing

Be sure to service rechargeable extinguishers, and replace disposable models immediately after use. Inspect extinguishers for damage, corrosion, or tampering regularly.