

Picking the Right Fire Extinguisher

What's at Stake?

Fire extinguishers are not a one type fits all piece of equipment. Different types of fire extinguishers are filled with different kinds of extinguishing agents designed to put out a specific type of fire or fires.

While operating a fire extinguisher is simple, in an emergency, even the simplest of tasks become difficult and if you accidentally choose the wrong type of extinguisher you put yourself and others in danger.

What's the Danger?

Using the wrong type of extinguisher to fight a fire can cause the fire to grow rapidly, cause an explosion, create a hazardous atmosphere, or lead to shock and electrocution.

- A water extinguisher used on electrical or oil fires may cause electric shock or explosion.
- A Type B or C carbon dioxide extinguisher used on a chemical fire may cause violent explosions.

How to Protect Yourself

Choosing the correct type of fire extinguisher for the fire you are trying to put out is key. Ask your supervisor if you are not sure what kind of fire extinguishers you have in your work area. The following list is a guide to the different classes of extinguishers and the types of fires they put out.

1. Class A Fire Extinguishers: paper, wood, rubber, cloth, and plastics.
2. Class B Fire Extinguishers: flammable liquids including grease, oil, gasoline, and oil based paints.
3. Class C Fire Extinguishers: electrical fires from circuit breaker panels, energized equipment, computers, and other electrical equipment.



4. Class D Fire Extinguishers: industrial applications including fires fueled by flammable metals.
5. Class K Fire Extinguishers: vegetable oils, animal oils, and other fats used for cooking. Used in commercial kitchens and restaurants with deep fat fryers.

Multipurpose Extinguishers - Some fire extinguishers are marked A-B-C or "multipurpose." These combination extinguishers may contain either a dry chemical or an inert gas and may be used on all three classes of fires.

Final Word

Learning the ABCD's and K's of fire extinguisher safety and knowing how to operate a fire extinguisher can help you protect yourself and others when a small fire breaks out.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Type D fire extinguishers should be used on kitchen fires involving cooking oils.
 True False
2. Electrical fires require what type of fire extinguisher?
a. A
b. B
c. C
d. D
3. Use Class B extinguishers on fires caused by gasoline, oil, or paint.
 True False
4. Using the wrong type of fire extinguisher could:
a. Create a hazardous atmosphere
b. Cause an explosion or fire to spread
c. Lead to shock or electrocution
d. All of the above

What Would You Do?

A fire has broken out at work in the breakroom. What steps would you take - what would you do first, second, and third? How would you decide if it was safe to fight the fire? How would you determine what type of fire extinguisher to use? What else would you do?

Meeting materials to go:

Safety meeting materials such as presentation tips, PowerPoint presentations, quiz answers and more are downloadable at www.SafeSupervisor.com

QUIZ ANSWERS 1.False 2.C 3.True 4.D