



Fire Extinguisher Safety

Fire extinguishers can be an important tool in preventing a small fire from growing larger. However, they should not be used to combat large or rapidly spreading fires. The most important thing to do during a fire is to get yourself to safety, then call the proper authorities to combat the fire. A building and the property inside are not worth putting yourself or anyone at risk trying to put it out with a fire extinguisher. It is important to understand how to use fire extinguishers and the limitations they have.

FIRE EXTINGUISHER LIMITATIONS

- A dry chemical fire extinguisher, such as the common red “ABC” extinguishers will reach a distance between 5 and 20 feet. It is important to be familiar with the models used in your work areas and the effective distances they can be used for.
- A 10lb to 20lb dry chemical fire extinguisher will last anywhere from 10 to 25 seconds. Again, this depends on the model and weight you are using.
- Fire extinguishers are only designed to fight small fires. Basically, it is “one extinguisher and then out,” meaning if the fire is not out after one extinguisher is spent, then it is time to bail and let the fire department handle it.

FIRE EXTINGUISHER INSPECTION TIPS

- Extinguishers should be periodically checked every 30 days. Depending on conditions on the job site, weekly inspections may be required. Fire extinguishers must also be serviced annually by a qualified service company.
- Ensure the pressure is okay when inspecting a fire extinguisher. There is a gauge that has an arrow that should be in the green portion of the gauge. If the arrow is in the red area, the fire extinguisher needs to be taken out of service until recharged.

- Check to make sure the pin is still in place. Often times the pin is bumped out of place, leaving the chance of accidental discharge occurring.
- Look for rust on the container and that the label is in good, readable condition.

What has been found during Inspections

- Damaged extinguishers, such as broken handles and missing nozzles.
- Discharged fire extinguishers or inadequately charged (arrow not in the GREEN).
- Inadequate amount of extinguishers. Per OSHA, the requirement for fire extinguishers on construction sites is one for every 3,000 square feet. If the floor is less than 3,000 square feet, then two per floor at a minimum.
- Expired annual inspections.
- Missing tags.
- Fire extinguishers hard to locate. They must be in an area where they can easily be located, such as hallways, near exits, or stairways.
- Hot work taking place without a fire extinguisher in near proximity.
- Fire extinguishers covered by paint or fire retardant, making it difficult to find or inspect.
- Fire extinguisher stored on elevated surface where it could fall off and be damaged.

SUMMARY

It is important to know more than just where the fire extinguishers are located in your work area. Make sure you know how to properly use them in case the time comes where you need to extinguish a fire. Always make sure the fire extinguishers in your work areas are in good condition through thorough inspections.

Jeremy. “Fire Extinguishers Use and Inspection.” Safety Talk Ideas, 23 Dec. 2022, www.safety-talkideas.com/safetytalks/fire-extinguisher-use.

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