

Fire Extinguisher 101:

A Brief Lesson on the Classes of Fire and How to Use a Fire Extinguisher

There are four classes of fires:

Class A – Fires involving ordinary combustibles such as wood, paper, cardboard, and most plastics. Extinguishers used for these fires are identified by a **Green Triangle** with an “A” inside or a picture of a trash can on the label.

Class B – Fires involving flammable or combustible liquids such as gasoline, kerosene, diesel fuel, and alcohol. Extinguishers used for these fires are identified by a **Red Square** with a “B” inside or a picture of a gasoline can on the label.

Class C – Fires involving ENERGIZED electrical equipment. Extinguishers capable of extinguishing these fires are identified by a **Blue Circle** with a “C” inside or a picture of an electrical cord and outlet on the label.

Class D – Fires involving combustible metals such as magnesium, titanium, and potassium. Extinguishers capable of extinguishing these fires are identified by a **Yellow Star** with a “D” inside on the label.



Fire extinguishers are categorized by the types of fires they can extinguish and the size of the fire they are capable of extinguishing. At West Chester University, there are a variety of fire extinguishers located throughout the campus. The most commonly found extinguishers are Class ABC extinguishers which use a dry chemical extinguishing agent, Class A water extinguishers which use water as the extinguishing agent, and Class BC extinguishers which can either use Carbon Dioxide gas or dry chemical as the extinguishing agent.

Typical Class ABC Extinguishers



A Typical Class A Fire Extinguisher



There are also Class D extinguishers located in certain laboratories where combustible metals may be present. These extinguishers use a dry powder specially formulated to extinguish combustible metals. Class K extinguishers can be found in kitchens where hot grease and oil are used to cook food. Class K extinguishers contain a water based foam agent specially designed to extinguish these grease and oil fires, which typically burn hotter than ordinary combustibles.

Class D Fire Extinguisher



Class K Fire Extinguisher



Before reviewing the proper use of fire extinguishers, it is important to remember that your safety and the safety of those around you are paramount. The various agents contained in the fire extinguishers around campus are not toxic; however, the smoke from the fire is. Make sure you are in a safe position before attempting to extinguish a fire.

Before any attempt at extinguishing a fire is made, be sure to sound the nearest fire alarm and call Public Safety at (610) 436-3311 or x3311 to report the fire.

Fire Extinguisher Use – A Quick Reference Guide

All fire extinguishers contain agent under stored pressure. They all operated in a similar fashion. You should become familiar with the fire extinguishers near your workplace or classroom prior to attempting to use one. Each fire extinguisher has instructions printed on the label.

Remember the helpful acronym below If you choose to attempt extinguishment:

P.A.S.S.

Pull the pin at the top of the extinguisher. The pin releases a locking mechanism and will allow you to discharge the extinguisher.

Aim at the base of the fire, not the flames. This is important – in order to put out the fire, you must extinguish the fuel.

Squeeze the lever slowly. This will release the extinguishing agent in the extinguisher. If the handle is released, the discharge will stop.

Sweep from side to side. Using a sweeping motion, move the fire extinguisher hose back and forth until the fire is completely out. Operate the extinguisher from a safe distance, several feet away then move toward the fire once it starts to diminish.

Never turn your back on a fire. Even if the fire appears to be out, back away from it slowly!

Never position yourself in a manner that prevents you from escaping in the event that the fire grows! Know where your exit is and make sure you can get to it if you are unable to extinguish the fire.

Anyone having questions regarding the use of fire extinguishers or any fire safety related issue should contact the Fire Safety Office at (610) 436-2129 or x2129.