



A-B-C's of Fire Extinguishers

Do any of your jobsites have fire extinguishers? Where are they located? Do you know how to use one? Have you ever had any fire extinguisher training? Is your jobsite's fire extinguisher fully charged? Are you familiar with the different types of fire extinguishers? If you answered "no" to any of these six questions, you failed the course

OSHA stipulates in the OSHA 1910 Standard 29 CFR 1910.157 that the employer (a) provide extinguishers designed to control different types of fires, (b) inspect, maintain and test extinguishers at least yearly, and (c) mount, locate, and identify extinguishers so they're easy to get to.

Let's talk about "different types of fires." To prevent or fight fires, you need to know that there are four kinds of fires and fire extinguishers. Each extinguisher is designed (by the National Fire Prevention Association--NFPA) for specific types and sizes of fires, as follows:

CLASS A extinguishers have a number such as 1-A, 2-A, etc. The higher the number the larger the fire that the extinguisher can handle. (As an example, a 2-A can handle a fire twice as large as a 1-A). A CLASS A extinguisher is designed to handle fires created by wood, rubber, cloth, dry rags, paper, plastics, etc.

CLASS B extinguishers are rated to tell how many square feet the extinguisher can handle. For example, a 5-B extinguisher should put out a 5 square foot fire. A Class B extinguisher is designed to handle fires created by flammable or combustible liquids, flammable gases, greases, and some rubber and plastic materials.

CLASS C extinguishers are based on patterns for existing CLASS A or CLASS B hazards, and are designed to handle fires created by electrical equipment.

CLASS D extinguishers are designed to handle fires created by combustible metals such as magnesium, titanium, zirconium, sodium, lithium and potassium.

If the fire extinguisher isn't reasonably close to the fire, you're out of luck. OSHA (and the NFPA) stipulate that extinguishers must be within at least 50 to 75 feet (depends on CLASS of fire) of the appropriate hazard (i.e., paper, wood, flammable liquids, electrical equipment, metals).

Depending on the size of the fire extinguisher (2.5 pound, 5 pound, 10 pound, etc.), the fire extinguisher may only last from four or five seconds, to twenty seconds. Aim well!

What's the most common type of fire fighting equipment? A class A-B-C fire extinguisher. So let's talk about what these fire extinguishers can do.

- Class A extinguishes fires of paper, wood, and cloth.
- Class B extinguishes fires of flammable or combustible liquids or greases.
- Class C extinguishes energized electrical equipment.

Employers must provide portable fire extinguishers for employee use. Extinguishers must be selected and distributed based on classes of anticipated workplace fires, and on the size and degree of the hazards.

Employers must provide training to employees on portable fire extinguisher use. All workers should familiarize themselves with the basics of fire extinguisher use, and the hazards involved with the initial stages of fire fighting.

Here are some safety tips for all fire fighters:

- Read and understand your company's written fire fighting plan.
- Designate a handler of fire extinguishing equipment for each jobsite. Know who it is on your jobsite.
- Complete (at minimum) the annual maintenance check that is required on all portable fire extinguishers.
- Make sure that portable fire extinguishers are maintained in a fully charged and operable condition.
- Have a back-up fire extinguisher when the in use fire extinguisher is discharged or fails to operate properly.
- Locate your jobsite fire extinguisher at the beginning of your workday.
- All extinguishers must have an INSPECTION TAG affixed to it, showing the "month" when it was last inspected.

What about your company's fire fighting plan? Are you familiar with the procedures? Do you know how to energize your jobsite's fire extinguisher? Who's in charge of the fire fighting equipment on your jobsite? Whose job is it to call the fire department?

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