Fire Extinguishers: Put the Fizzle to a Workplace Sizzle

Your company may be equipped with automatic sprinklers or other means of fire protection, but the portable fire extinguisher is the first line of defense to control fires when they start.

A portable fire extinguisher can easily put out most fires in their early stages, but only if the equipment is readily accessible and you know how to use it. The reaction time after first discovering a fire is extremely important. If time is wasted searching for the proper fire extinguisher and reviewing the operating instructions, a small, easily-controlled fire could spread in size and intensity. The fire could get out of control, endangering both lives and equipment.

Necessary Knowledge

Did you know there are different types of fire extinguishers? Yours should reflect the type and character of the potential fire for your company and its operations. All fire extinguishers are marked according to the specific class of fire that they are designed to handle. Letters will indicate the class of fuel for which the extinguisher will be effective:

- Class A fires include wood, paper and textiles
- Class B fires include flammable liquids
- Class C fires include electrical equipment
- Class D fires include metal powders and shavings
- Class K fire extinguishers are required for commercial and restaurant kitchens

Be aware of other fire safety factors to ensure quick and effective employee action:

- Know your fire extinguisher’s location—it should be clearly marked and readily accessible.
- Make sure all your employees know where the fire extinguishers are located and how to operate them. Training should be part of your company’s Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP)
- Have an inspection and recharging program in place to ensure that an extinguisher is fully charged and operational when needed. Make sure that:
  - Each extinguisher has the correct charge level.
  - The seal is intact.
  - No parts are missing or damaged
  - The record tag is attached and current.
  - All extinguishers are kept in their proper brackets, with no obstructions to quick access.

Too many fires have spread because the wrong extinguisher was used, it was empty, the employee didn’t know how to operate the extinguisher, or the employee could not find one in time to be of any help. Knowing where the fire extinguishers are and how to use them is essential for a safe workplace.

For more information on fire extinguishers, visit our Safety Resource Center.