

Using Portable Fire Extinguishers

In the event of a fire, the correct use of a portable fire extinguisher could mean the difference between suffering a minor loss or a major one. Portable fire extinguishers, if used properly, can make that difference. In using fire extinguishers, you must know the *class* of fire involved and the correct *type* of fire extinguisher to use.

Classes of Fires and Fire Extinguishers

- **Class A:** Involves ordinary combustibles such as paper, wood, cloth, rubber or plastics. The common extinguishing media is water or dry chemical.
- **Class B:** Flammable liquids, grease or gases are covered under this category.
- Common extinguishing media are foam, carbon dioxide or dry chemical.
- **Class C:** Live electrical fires are class C. CO₂ or dry chemical extinguishers should be used. However, the actual burning product may be a class A item.
- **Class D:** Burning materials include combustible metals such as magnesium and sodium. Special extinguishing agents, approved by recognized testing laboratories, are needed when working with these metals.

Responding to Fires

Sound the fire alarm and call the local fire department immediately if a fire breaks out. Follow your company's procedures on responding to fires. But attempt to *fight* the fire only if: (1) you know the type of combustible material burning, (2) you have been trained to use the fire extinguisher correctly, and (3) if the fire is still in the incipient (beginning) stage. If the fire gets too large or out of control, evacuate immediately.

Remember P-A-S-S When Using an Extinguisher

- **P – Pull.** Pull the locking pin before using the fire extinguisher.
- **A – Aim.** Aim the fire extinguisher at the base of the fire. Not at the flames or smoke.
- **S – Squeeze.** Squeeze the lever of the fire extinguisher to operate and discharge.
- **S – Sweep.** Sweep the fire extinguisher back and forth at the base of the fire. Most extinguishers will only allow about 10-seconds of extinguishing media.

Prevention is the key when it comes to firefighting. Good housekeeping, proper storage procedures and safe work practices will go a long way toward reducing the likelihood that a fire will destroy valuable property or injure either you or a fellow employee.

Discussion Questions

- What is your company's policy on sounding alarms and contacting the fire department?
- What kinds of flammables are most likely to create a fire danger at your jobsite?
- What type of fire extinguisher should be used on those flammables or combustibles?

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