



by Scott Obel

Do I Really Need a Fire Extinguisher?

The most important parts of a fire safety plan are, by far, smoke alarms and an evacuation plan. Should you also buy one or more fire extinguishers? Yes, but only if you know when and how to use them.

With proper training and education, fire extinguishers can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or suppressing it until the fire department arrives. Here are some things you should know when choosing, maintaining and using fire extinguishers.

Choosing and Maintaining Fire Extinguishers

For the home, select a multi-purpose extinguisher that can be used on all types of home fires. Choose one that is large enough to put out a small fire but not too heavy to handle. The fire extinguisher should have the label of an independent testing laboratory.

Some extinguishers need to be shaken monthly, others need to be pressure-tested every few years. It's helpful if the extinguisher has a gauge that shows if the pressure is too high or too low.

Make sure that the can, hoses and nozzles aren't damaged, dented, or rusted. Remove any dust, oil, or grease that might be on the outside of the extinguisher. Read the instructions that come with the fire extinguisher and become familiar with its parts and operation before a fire breaks out.

Fire extinguishers should be stored close to an exit. Be sure nothing is blocking or limiting your ability to reach it.

Using Fire Extinguishers

Local fire departments or fire equipment distributors often offer hands-on fire extinguisher trainings.

Use a portable fire extinguisher when

- the fire is confined to a small area, such as a wastebasket, and is not growing,
- everyone has exited the building,
- the fire department has been called or is being called,
- the room is not filled with smoke.

To operate a fire extinguisher, remember the word **PASS**:

- **P**ull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you, and release the locking mechanism.
- **A**im low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.
- **S**queeze the lever slowly and evenly.
- **S**weep the nozzle from side-to-side.

Keep your back to a clear exit when you use the device so you can make an easy escape if the fire cannot be controlled. If the room fills with smoke, leave immediately.

Only adults who know how to operate portable fire extinguishers should use them. Children should not be trained to use a fire extinguisher. They should be taught to get out and stay out if there's a fire.

Whether or not you have a fire extinguisher, remember that because fires grow and spread rapidly, the #1 priority is to get out safely. For this reason, no household should be without working smoke alarms and a fire escape plan.

If you would you like to practice using a fire extinguisher and other emergency response equipment, CERT classes will be offered in spring and include fire extinguishment training. For information, email nbcert@nbfd.net.

The following QR code will take you a short video on fire extinguisher selection:

