

## Home Portable Fire Extinguishers

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### Extinguishers have limits:

Used properly, a portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives.

Portable extinguishers for home use, however, are not designed to fight large or spreading fires. Even against small fires, they are useful only under certain conditions.

(Extinguishers should never be used by children.)

- The operator must know how to use the extinguisher. There is no time to read directions during an emergency. Read the directions beforehand.
- The extinguisher must be within easy reach, in working order, and fully charged.
- The operator must have a clear escape route that will not be blocked by fire.
- The extinguisher must match the type of fire being fought. Extinguishers containing water are unsuitable for use on grease or electrical fires.
- The extinguisher must be large enough to put out the fire. Many portable extinguishers discharge completely in as few as eight to ten seconds, so in order for it to be effective, you have to know what you are doing.

### Choosing your extinguisher:

Select only fire extinguishers that have been tested by an independent laboratory and labeled for the type and size of fire they can extinguish. Use the labels as a guide to purchase the kind of extinguisher that suits your anticipated needs.

### Classes of fires:

There are three basic classes of fires. All fire extinguishers are labeled with standard symbols for the classes of fires they can put out. A red slash through any of the symbols tells you the extinguisher cannot be used on that class of fire. A missing symbol tells you only that the extinguisher has not been tested for a given class of fire.

- **Class "A":** Ordinary combustibles such as wood, cloth, and paper.
- **Class "B":** Flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, paint thinners, and oil-based paint.
- **Class "C":** Energized electrical equipment, including wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery, and appliances. A "C" rating states it is safe to use on energized electrical equipment.

The extinguisher must be appropriate for the type of fire being fought. Multipurpose fire extinguishers, labeled ABC, may be used on all three classes of fire. If you use the wrong type of extinguisher, you can endanger yourself and make the fire worse.

Cooking oil fires in a pan can be snuffed out by using a tight-fitting lid and turning the heat source off. Discharging the extinguisher closer than six to eight feet may spread the fire, as the extinguishing agent is discharged under pressure, similar to using your garden hose nozzle.

### Extinguisher Sizes:

Portable extinguishers are also rated for the size of the fire they can handle. This rating will appear on the label. As an example, 2A10BC. The larger the numbers, the larger the fire that the extinguisher can put out, but higher rated models are often heavier. Make sure you can hold and operate an extinguisher before you buy it.

### Installation and Maintenance:

Extinguishers should be installed in plain view, above the reach of children, near an escape route, and away from stoves and heating appliances.

Extinguishers require routine care. Read your operator's manual or the instructions on the extinguisher to learn how to inspect your extinguisher. Follow manufacturer's instructions for maintenance.

Rechargeable models must be serviced after every use. (Service companies are listed in the yellow pages of the phone book under "Fire Extinguishers"). Disposable extinguishers can be used only once and must be replaced after use.

### **Using the extinguisher: Remember the Pass-word.**

Keep your back to an unobstructed exit and stand six to eight feet away from the fire. Follow the four step procedure: Pull, Aim, Squeeze, and Sweep.

Pull the pin: This unlocks the operating lever and allows you to discharge the extinguisher. Some extinguishers may have other lever-release mechanisms. The extinguisher will not operate if you do not do this.

Aim Low: Point the extinguisher nozzle (or hose) at the base of the fire.

Squeeze the lever above the handle: This discharges the extinguishing agent. Releasing the lever will stop the discharge. (Some extinguishers have a button instead of a lever).

Sweep from side to side: Moving carefully towards the fire, keep the extinguisher aimed at the base of the fire and sweep back and forth until the flames appear to be out. Watch the fire area. If the fire reignites, repeat the process.

Always be sure the fire department inspects the fire site, even if you think you've extinguished the fire.

### **Should You Fight The Fire?**

Before you begin to fight a fire, make sure that:

- Everyone has left, or is leaving, the building, and that the fire department has been called.
- The fire is confined to a small area and is not spreading.
- You have an unobstructed escape route to which the fire will not spread.
- The extinguisher is the right type for the fire.
- You have read the instructions and that you know how to use the extinguisher.

It is reckless to fight a fire in any other circumstances. Instead, leave immediately and close off the area and make sure the fire department has been called.