

Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers--they 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 only useful under certain conditions. (Extinguishers should never be used by children.)

- ✦ The operator should know how to use the extinguisher. There is no time to read directions in an emergency.
- ✦ 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.

All fire extinguishers are 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 needs.

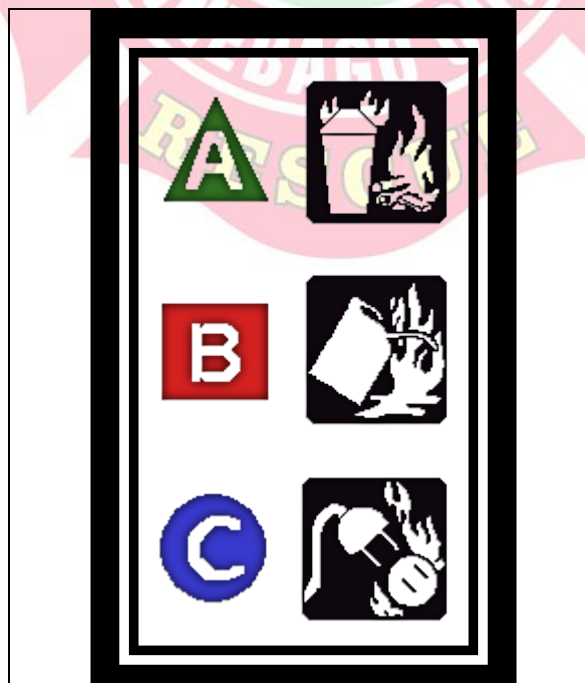
CLASSES OF FIRE

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 symbol 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 and oil based paint.

Class C: Energized electrical equipment including wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery and appliances.



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. The only appropriate agents are sodium or potassium bicarbonate. Discharging the extinguisher closer than six to eight feet may spread the fire.

EXTINGUISHER SIZES





Extinguishers are also rated for the size of fire they can handle. This rating will also appear on the label. For example, 2A:10B:C. 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 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 under "fire extinguishers" or check with your local hardware store. Disposable fire extinguishers can only be used once and must be replaced after use.

TO USE THE EXTINGUISHER, REMEMBER THE PASSWORD.

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.
-  *Aim* low: Point the extinguisher nozzle (or hose) at the base of the fire.
-  *Squeeze* the lever above the handle: This discharges the agent. Releasing the lever will stop the discharge. Some extinguishers have a button instead of a lever.
-  *Sweep* from side to side: Moving carefully toward 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 re-ignites, repeat the process.

ALWAYS be sure the fire department inspects the fire site, even if you think you extinguished the fire. It could be smoldering or have 'extended' behind walls, carpet or other barriers.