

Extinguish Your Doubts about Fighting Fires

It's important to learn about lifesaving equipment like portable fire extinguishers. Know how to operate a portable fire extinguisher, what type to use for certain types of fires, and when to let professional fire fighters do the job. If you have not had fire extinguisher training, talk to your supervisor about the possibility of a training session. Consider your local fire department which will possibly come to the workplace to give a training session.

Here are a few things to keep in mind about portable fire extinguishers:

- ◆ Fire extinguishers must be regularly checked and serviced. Know who is responsible for fire extinguisher inspection in your area. If you think the extinguishers near you should be checked, talk to this person about it. At HNC, the Building Manager ensures the fire extinguishers are inspected monthly.
- ◆ Once a fire extinguisher has been discharged, even partially, it needs to be taken out of service, checked, and refilled. A partially discharged fire extinguisher is as useless as an empty one.
- ◆ Take a look at the fire extinguisher closest to you. You will probably see one or more of these symbols:
 - Type A is used to put out fires involving ordinary combustibles like wood, cloth, paper, many plastics, and other common materials that burn easily. These extinguishers are usually water-filled. The Type A extinguisher should never be used on an electrical fire as water conducts electricity.
 - Type B is used for flammable liquids like gasoline, oil, grease, and tar. Type B extinguishers consist of dry chemicals, foam, or a carbon dioxide fog to put out the fire.
 - Type C is used for fires occurring in energized electrical equipment like fuse boxes, wiring, machinery, and circuit breakers. This type of extinguisher contains a type of dry chemical or carbon dioxide.
- ◆ Some fire extinguishers may have only one of these symbols; others may have two or more. The most common type of fire extinguisher is an ABC combination, which can be used to fight any class A, B, or C fire.

Once you are familiar with the various types of fire extinguishers, you should learn when it's appropriate for you to fight a fire.

- ◆ Before you even consider fighting a fire, make sure the alarm has been activated and the fire department has been called.
- ◆ Have you been trained in the proper use of a fire extinguisher? If not, then ensure the fire alarm has been sounded and get out!
 - ◆ You must have an escape route available to you in case the fire gets out of hand.
 - ◆ Is the fire contained, or is there a possibility of it spreading beyond the area where it started? If it is larger than a wastebasket size, get out! There is no time to spare in a fire.
 - ◆ If you are not sure what kind of fire extinguisher to use, don't fight the fire. You could do more harm than good.

Portable fire extinguishers are handy and useful devices, but you must know all about them before you try to use them. Make it your personal goal to learn how to use fire extinguishers.

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