Fire Extinguishers Use and Inspection Meeting Kit

The federal portable fire extinguisher rule applies to the placement, use, maintenance, and testing of portable fire extinguishers provided for the use of employees. Employers are generally required to provide portable fire extinguishing equipment in the workplace for use in fighting incipient-stage fires. An “incipient-stage fire” means initial or beginning stage that can be controlled or extinguished by portable fire extinguishers.

ACCIDENTS WAITING TO HAPPEN

Organizations of all kinds can take steps to reduce their chances of a fire-related accident:

- Limit access to flammable or combustible materials, and store them in a cool, dry place—away from other materials or devices that could catch on fire.
- Inspect electronic devices, as well as flammable and combustible materials, for damage and degradation. If something is broken or has expired, get rid of it.
- Plan ahead. Use flammable or combustible materials in a safe, open space, and wear proper protective materials. Create an emergency action plan, and train and periodically remind employees what to do in the event of a fire.
- Practice common-sense safety. Don’t light fireworks indoors, in crowded spaces, or during a windy day. Follow the instructions for using flammable or combustible materials. Don’t mix fire and alcohol.

Safety tips

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; and the room is not filled with smoke.

P.A.S.S. Method

The easiest way to remember how to use a fire extinguisher is to follow the P.A.S.S. method. The PASS acronym was developed to allow people to remember the basic four steps to properly using a fire extinguisher.

P- Pull. Pull the pin. Hold the extinguisher away and release the locking mechanism.

A- Aim. Aim the stream towards the base of the fire. Spraying the flames will not put the fire out.

S- Squeeze. Squeeze the lever slowly and evenly. Pulling the lever too fast may shoot the stream from your target wasting the valuable firefighting agent.

S- Sweep. Sweep the nozzle side to side to combat the fire.

PORTABLE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Portable fire extinguishers are specifically designed to fight different types of fires. The most common fire extinguisher classifications are as follows:

Class A– Solid combustibles excl. wood, metal, cloth, paper, plastics, and rubber

Class B– Flammable liquids incl. oil, gasoline, paint, and grease

Class C– Energized electrical fire (Class C fire becomes null and void if electrical source is removed)

Class D– Electrical equipment incl. outlets and appliances

Class K– Cooking oil, animal and vegetable fats, and grease

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

- Employers must provide an educational program to familiarize employees with the general principles of fire extinguisher

use and the hazards involved with incipient stage fire fighting.

- Provide this education when employees are first hired and once a year thereafter.
- Train employees (who have been designated to use fire fighting equipment in the emergency action plan) in the use of the equipment.

Provide this training when employees are first given this assignment and once a year thereafter.

FIRE EXTINGUISHER LIMITATIONS

- A dry chemical fire extinguisher such as the common red “ABC” extinguishers will reach a distance between 5 and 20 feet. It is important to be familiar with the models used in your work areas and the effective distance they can be used for.
- A 10lb to 20lb dry chemical fire extinguisher will last anywhere from 10 to 25 seconds. Again, this depends on the model and weight you are using.
- Fire extinguishers are only designed to fight small fires. A rule of thumb a lot of professional’s use is the size of the fire should not be any larger than the size of a small trash can.

FIRE EXTINGUISHER INSPECTION TIPS

- Extinguishers should be periodically checked every 30 days. There should be a formal check of all fire extinguishers onsite annually. These inspections should be documented.
- Ensure the pressure is okay when inspecting a fire extinguisher. There is a gauge that has an arrow that should be in the green portion of the gauge. If the arrow is in the red the fire extinguisher needs to be tagged out of service until recharged.
- Check to make sure the pin is still in place. Often times

the pin is bumped out of place leaving the chance of accidental discharge occurring.
- Look for rust on the container and ensure that the label is in good readable condition.

MORE TIPS

- **Make Fire Extinguishers Readily Available**
- **Only Use Approved Fire Extinguishers**
- **Avoid Fire Extinguishers with Carbon Tetrachloride or Chlorobromomethane**
- **Test Regularly**

FINAL WORD

It is important to know more than just where the fire extinguishers are located in your work area. Make sure you know how to properly use them in case the time comes where you need to extinguish a fire. Always make sure the fire extinguishers in your work areas are in good condition through thorough inspections.