



Toolbox Talk: How to Use a Portable Fire Extinguisher

Introduction/Overview:

According to NFPA, there are approximately 3,340 fires per year in office environments resulting in four civilian deaths, 44 civilian fire injuries, and \$112 million in direct property damage. Most of these fires occur while the office building is occupied. So, what would you do if a fire broke out in your office area? Evacuate immediately or grab a fire extinguisher to put out the fire? Your safety is more important than property, and you should leave immediately. If you choose to use a fire extinguisher or you must use it because the fire is between you and the exit, you need to know how to use a fire extinguisher. While fire extinguishers are everywhere few people know anything about them or even how to use them.

Talking Points on Portable Fire Extinguisher Use:

Types and their Usage: Fire extinguishers are classified by the type of fire that they will extinguish.

Class A - Used for ordinary combustibles, such as wood, paper, some plastics, and textiles. Class A fire extinguishers should be identified by a triangle containing the letter "A."

Class B - Used for flammable liquid and gas fires such as oil, gasoline, etc. Class B fire extinguishers should be identified by a square containing the letter "B."

Class C - Used on fires that involve live electrical equipment, which requires the use of electrically nonconductive extinguishing agents. (Once the electrical equipment is de-energized, extinguishers for Class A or B fires may be used.) Class C fire extinguishers should be identified by a circle containing the letter "C."

Class D - Used on combustible metals, such as magnesium, titanium, sodium, etc., which require an extinguishing medium that does not react with the burning metal. Class D fire extinguishers should be identified by a five-point star containing the letter "D."

Class K - Used on fires involving cooking media (fats, grease, and oils) in commercial cooking sites such as restaurants. The alkaline mixture combined with the fatty acid creates a soapy foam on the surface that holds in the vapors and steam and extinguishes the fire. These extinguishers are identified by the letter K

You will likely encounter an **ABC** fire extinguisher in your work area. This fire extinguisher can be used on Class A, B, and C fires, which are the most common in the office environment.

- **Proper Usage**

If you are going to use the fire extinguisher, you should be between 6-8 feet away from the fire and use the acronym **P.A.S.S.** to help you use it correctly.

Developed by:

- **P**ull the pin.
- **A**im at the base of the flame
- **S**queeze the handle
- **S**weep the nozzle back and forth until the fire is out or the extinguisher is empty

Additional Discussion Notes:

Final Thoughts:

Fire extinguishers should only be used if doing so doesn't put you in danger. Ensure the fire is not between you and your escape route. Fire extinguishers are only effective in the incipient (or beginning) phase of fire. There is nothing in your office space worth risking your life over.

NOTE: Always promote discussion with the attendees. If a question comes up that no one in attendance can answer, please contact OWC or the Loss Control Innovations consultants for assistance.

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References:

[The ABCs, Ds, and Ks of Fire Extinguishers](#)
[Occupational Health and Safety Online article](#)

[U.S. Structure Fires in Office Properties](#)
[NFPA's Report by Richard Campbell](#)