2024-07-15 TBT Fire Extinguishers

When a fire breaks out, the correct use of a fire extinguisher can be the difference between a minor loss or a major loss. It’s easier to put out a small fire than it is to outrun a forest fire.

Responding to fires

When you see a fire on the jobsite, the first steps to take are to pull the fire alarm, call 911, and notify your immediate supervisor. Then, you should assess whether or not the fire is small enough that it can be controlled with a fire extinguisher. Don’t waste time taking pictures, posting it on Facebook, or singing in your best Alicia Keys voice – “That house is on fire!”

If you are attempting to extinguish a fire, you should:

Know what type of combustible material is burning

Have been trained to use a fire extinguisher correctly

Make sure the fire is still in the early stages

If the fire is quickly getting out of control, or you do not know what material is burning or how to properly use a fire extinguisher, you should instead evacuate the work area immediately.

Do not enter a building that is on fire under any circumstances.

Classes of fires

There are four different classes of fires, categorized by the type of material and fuel contributing to combustion.

The most likely type we would deal with is Class A.

Class A

Class A fires involve ordinary combustibles such as paper, wood, cloth, rubber, or plastics. Common extinguishing agents for this class are water or dry chemicals.

Class B

Class B fires involve flammable liquids, grease, or gasses. Common extinguishing agents are foam, carbon dioxide, or dry chemicals.

Class C

Class C fires are live electrical fires. Sometimes when fires start this way, a class A combustible may also be involved. However, only a dry chemical extinguisher should be used to extinguish all class c fires. Never use water.

Class D

Class D fires involve combustible metals such as magnesium and sodium. Special extinguishing agents are needed to extinguish class D fires.

P.A.S.S. method

P- Pull the pin

Hold the extinguisher away from your body and release the locking mechanism.

A- Aim

Aim the stream towards the base of the fire. Do not aim at smoke or flames, as this will not put the fire out.

S- Squeeze

Make sure you squeeze the lever slowly and evenly. If you pull the lever too fast you could shoot the stream where you are not intending and waste valuable fire-fighting agents.

S- Sweep

Be sure to sweep the nozzle side to side at the base of the fire to combat and extinguish the fire.

Fire extinguishers limitations

It is important to know the limitations of your fire extinguisher before you have to use it and put yourself in danger. Some limitations include:

A dry chemical fire extinguisher such as the common "ABC" red extinguishers will reach a distance between 5 and 20 feet. It is important for you to know what type of extinguisher is located in your work area and know the effective distance they can be used for in case of a fire at work.

The length of time the extinguisher can be used depends on the model type and weight. Make sure you are familiar with how long the available extinguisher will last.

Fire extinguishers are designed to fight small fires. This means the fire should be about the size of a small trash can if you are looking to extinguish it with a basic fire extinguisher. If it is any larger, you should instead evacuate.

Fire extinguisher inspection tips

The extinguisher should be checked for damage or malfunction by a worker every 30 days. There should also be a more thorough, documented inspection by a fire prevention specialist at least once a year.

Check the pressure when inspecting the fire extinguisher. Every extinguisher has a gauge that has an arrow measuring the pressure, and the arrow should be located within the green section of the gauge. If the arrow is in the red, the extinguisher needs to be flagged and put out of service until it has been recharged.

Check to make sure the pin is still in place. Sometimes the pin can be bumped out of place, which increases the chance of an accidental discharge.

Check for rust on the container and ensure the label is in good, readable condition.

Following these tips should ensure that the extinguisher in your work area will be ready in the case of an emergency.

Fire extinguisher safety starts with you

In the case of a fire at work, it is important to know more than just where the extinguisher is located. Make sure you know how to properly use the extinguisher, know the limitations of the extinguisher, and know how to keep the extinguishers in good working order.

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Revision #1
Created 2024-07-12 14:21:31 UTC by Dale Bergman
Updated 2024-07-12 14:23:47 UTC by Dale Bergman