



Fire Extinguishers for Employees

We see fire extinguishers everywhere and sometimes we may take for granted they are there. Yes, the law requires them, and yes, they can help put out a fire. However, do you know how to use them? Do you know where they are located? Do you know if they will work if you should need them in an emergency? These are all important questions that we need to make sure everyone can answer.

First, identify where all fire extinguishers and emergency equipment is located in your place of work. Your employer, in conjunction with the local fire marshal, has requirements for where they are to be placed. Can you identify where your extinguishers are?

Do you know the type of fire extinguisher(s) that you have in your work areas?

Most businesses have ABC type or universal fire extinguishers, but you may have a special workplace situation, like chemicals or a kitchen that requires a different type of extinguisher.

Can you get to them? We need to be able to access fire extinguishers in the event of an emergency. Often we take them for granted and place things in front of and around them, making access to them difficult and sometimes impossible. The law says 30 inches (50 inches for big extinguishers) of clearance but it is nice to have a 3 foot block around the extinguisher... you know ...just in case you need it.

Exiting is always your first priority. Fire extinguishers are only used for **incipient or beginning stages** of a fire. You are not a firefighter. Your first priority should be to exit the area and ensure you are safe. Fire extinguishers can be helpful on a small fire. However, larger fires should be handled by trained professional fire fighters.

Consider providing a checklist to help employees prepare to use a fire extinguisher on a potential fire.

For example:

- Have I alerted others in the building that there is a fire?
- Has someone called the fire department?
- Am I physically able to use a fire extinguisher?
- Is the fire small and contained in a single object (like a pan or a wastebasket)?
- Am I safe from the fire's toxic smoke?
- Do I have a clear escape route?

Use a fire extinguisher when all of these questions are answered "yes." If you are not sure about whether or not it is safe to use a fire extinguisher and for all other situations, alert others, leave the building, and call 911 from a mobile device or neighbor's phone.

Using the Fire Extinguisher

When operating a fire extinguisher remember the word **PASS**:

1. **Pull** the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you and release the locking mechanism.
2. **Aim** low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.
3. **Squeeze** the lever slowly and evenly.
4. **Sweep** the nozzle from side-to-side.