



Fire Extinguishers

Used properly, a portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives. Many lives have been lost in fires simply because people were not prepared to deal with accidental fires. In fact, it is estimated that less than five percent of the nation's homes have fire extinguishers. Fire extinguishers are considered first-aid equipment for controlling and putting out small fires before they become large ones. However, they are no substitute for the fire department in the event of a large or major blaze.

Having the proper fire extinguisher, as well as knowing how to use it and how not to use it is important in safeguarding your household.

Selecting the proper extinguisher for your home is as simple as A-B-C. There are three basic classes of fires. All fire extinguishers are labeled using standard symbols for the classes of fires they can put out. A slash through any of the symbols tells you the extinguisher cannot be used on that class of fire. A missing symbol tells you only that the extinguisher has not been tested for a class of fire.



ORDINARY
COMBUSTIBLES
A



FLAMABLE
LIQUIDS
B



ELECTRICAL
EQUIPMENT
C

The key to fire extinguisher codes is as follows:

Class A: for wood, paper cloth and other ordinary combustibles,

Class B: for oil, grease, flammable liquids and combustible gases and

Class C: for energized electrical and electronic equipment.

The types of fire on which the extinguisher is effective is marked by these letters on the label or nameplate.

The number preceding the letter indicates the relative size of fire on which it is effective. Thus, a 10B:C rated fire extinguisher can be used on a gas, liquid or electrical fire roughly twice the size as that combated effectively by a 5B:C extinguisher.

The three types of fires described above are common to most households. For this reason, an all-purpose extinguisher with a 2A:10B:C rating is adequate for most household uses. This unit will no doubt be a little more expensive but a less expensive one may turn out to be anything but a bargain if it can't handle your emergency needs.

As an alternate, but several smaller extinguishers to handle different needs – such as a Class A extinguisher for the bedroom and living areas, and a Class B:C extinguisher for the kitchen, workshop and laundry areas.

In any case, extinguishers won't do any good if they are not located and installed for easy use. Extinguishers should never be more than 75 feet away from Class A hazards or farther than 50 feet from Class B hazards.

Place them in areas of potential fire hazards, but never on or near furnaces, stoves, or equipment which couldn't be approached in case it caught fire.

Make sure that all members of the family know how to use fire extinguishers. Hold actual family practice sessions, if possible, but make certain you purchase a recharge kit, or let a professional recharge it for you, afterwards. A unit with a gauge will enable you to check for enough pressure to do the job effectively.

If a fire strikes, don't forget to evacuate other members of the family and call for your fire department first. Fire extinguishers are for use in controlling small fires providing you have a way out – not in combating conflagrations.