

Fire Extinguishers: Remember the PASS-word

A fire is a frightening experience, but if you know how to operate a portable fire extinguisher and remember the PASS-word, you can fight back with confidence. You should always activate the building fire alarm to alert co-workers and customers first. Next, call the fire department or other emergency numbers. Only then fight the fire, and only if it is about the size of a wastepaper basket or smaller.

Here's your PASS-word to safety:

Pull the pin or remove the plastic locking strap. This action unlocks the lever and allows the extinguisher to be discharged. Be sure you have the correct type of extinguisher for the fire. Never use water on an electrical fire or you could risk an electrical shock.

Aim low at the base of the flames, not at the smoke. Keep low and stand a few feet back from the fire.

Squeeze the lever and the handle together to discharge the extinguisher. Release the lever when you want to stop discharging to check the state of the fire.

Sweep from side to side. Aim carefully as you only have about 10 to 20 seconds, depending on the size and type of extinguisher. Be sure to hit all sides of the fire and any stray spots. When the fire appears to be out, check for live embers. Watch for sudden flare-ups as the hot embers are exposed to the air.

- * Never attempt to fight a fire in an enclosed space such as a storage room. Smoke and gases from the fire, along with the contents of the extinguisher, could displace the oxygen and cause you to lose consciousness. Your escape route could also be cut off by fire or smoke. Fight the fire while backing toward the exit.
- * And here's the most important point: Always leave yourself an escape route. Never allow yourself to be trapped in a room with only one exit. If the extinguisher does not put the fire out, you will have to leave quickly and safely.

As mentioned earlier, you have to choose the correct extinguisher for the type of fire. Ask your supervisor if you are not sure what kind of fire extinguishers you have in your work area.

The following list is intended only as a quick reference:

- ✓ Class A = **Think Ashes**: These fire extinguishers are intended for ordinary combustibles such as paper, wood, cardboard or cloth.
- ✓ Class B = **Think Barrel**: These extinguishers are used for products you would normally associate with being in a barrel. Some examples are gasoline, oil-based paints, lacquers, solvents and greases.
- ✓ Class C = **Think Current**: These extinguishers are used on energized electrical equipment such as circuit breaker panels, wiring, computers and printers.
- ✓ Multipurpose: Many household fire extinguishers are marked A-B-C or "multipurpose." These combination extinguishers may contain either a dry chemical or an inert gas and may be used on all three classes of fires.

By planning ahead and knowing how to operate a portable fire extinguisher, you will stay calm and react quickly in an emergency. Take firefighting seriously - it could be your PASS-port to safety.