



Fire Extinguishers: Proper Selection and Use

A portable fire extinguisher can be an effective tool for controlling small household fires, potentially saving lives and property. However, it's important to understand the types of household fire extinguishers available, how to properly use them, and their limitations.

Types of household fire extinguishers:

- Class A Extinguisher: For wood, paper, cloth, cardboard, and most ordinary combustibles. Contains water.
- Class B Extinguisher: For flammable liquids, such as oil, solvents, greases, and gases. Contains dry chemicals, carbon dioxide, or halogenated agents to smother the fire with foam.
- Class C Extinguisher: For energized electrical equipment such as electrical boxes, panels, transformers, etc. Contains dry chemicals, carbon dioxide, or halogenated agents to smother the fire with foam.

To operate a fire extinguisher, remember the word PASS:

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

Safety tips:

- Consider having one or more working fire extinguishers in your home that carry the label of an independent testing laboratory. Multiple rating extinguishers are available; type A-B-C is recommended for home use. Make sure it's large enough to put out a small fire, but not too heavy to handle.
- Read the accompanying instructions and become familiar with all of the extinguisher's parts and operation. Get training from the fire department or fire extinguisher manufacturer on how to use it.
- When using a portable fire extinguisher, keep your back to a clear exit to ensure an easy escape if the fire cannot be controlled. If you try to use an extinguisher and the fire does not immediately subside, drop it and get out. Most portable extinguishers empty in 8 to 10 seconds.
- Know when to go. In a fire, the first priority is to get out safely. Use a portable fire extinguisher only when the fire is confined to a small area and it is not growing. If the room fills with smoke, leave immediately.
- Make sure your portable fire extinguisher is properly charged. Use the gauge or test button to check proper pressure. Follow manufacturer's instructions for replacement or recharging.

Tips adapted from the National Fire Protection Association.

For additional information:

National Fire Protection Association, <http://www.nfpa.org>

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