

MAFES Dawg Tracks



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Proper Use of Fire Extinguishers



Some subjects are worth the repeating. The proper use of fire extinguishers is one of them. We can talk about the use of fire extinguishers very regularly, but not using them (gracias a Dios) makes us get a little rusty on the proper way to use them in case we should experience a natural or man-made disaster.

Although most of us are not required to follow OSHA regulations, one of their absolute rules is that no one is supposed to use a fire extinguisher unless they have been trained. If an untrained individual tries to use an extinguisher on a blaze, some serious mistakes can happen. There are four things to remember when it comes to operating a fire extinguisher:

- **USE YOUR JUDGMENT** ----
- **COMMUNICATE** ----
- **READY THE EXTINGUISHER** ----
- **USE IT!** ----
- **USE YOUR JUDGMENT** ----

If you see smoke or fire, you should use your own judgment before you decide to extinguish the blaze.

Ask yourself the following three questions:

- Is the fire limited in size and spread?
- Do you have an escape route in case something goes wrong?
- Do you know the location of the fire extinguisher nearest you and the location of others in the area?

If you aren't confident about the size of the fire and your safety, you should move out of the area and call 9-1-1-**immediately!**

COMMUNICATE – Once you have decided to extinguish the blaze, make every reasonable attempt to tell at least one other person what you are doing. This person should report your activity to someone else as soon as possible.

READY THE EXTINGUISHER – Select the right extinguisher. Extinguishers are classified according to the type of fires that they will extinguish. Obviously, it is important to have the proper extinguisher. Also, extinguishers are rated for more than one type of fire, but some are rated for one particular type of fire. You have to be sure that you are using the proper type for the fire that you want to extinguish. Following are the types of extinguishers and their intended purpose,

Class A – Ordinary combustibles – Wood, paper, cloth, rubber and many plastics.

Class B – Flammable liquids – Gasoline, tar, oil, oil-based paint, lacquer, grease and flammable paint.

Class C – Energized electric equipment – Wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery and appliances.

Class D – Flammable solids – Magnesium

Class K – Kitchen fires – Deep fat fryers, etc.

We discussed using judgment, communicating and part of “ready the extinguisher” earlier. We shall explore the steps in readying the extinguisher for actual use below:

READY THE EXTINGUISHER –

- Quickly and carefully remove the extinguisher from the holding bracket. Handle it with care as it might be heavy.
- Stand about 5 feet away from the fire.
- Extend the nozzle toward the fire.

USE IT – Once the extinguisher is ready, you are now ready to release the extinguishing agent. Obviously, there is a proper way to do this. If you squeeze the handle before you have aimed the nozzle at the fire, you will waste valuable time and extinguishing agent.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has published a technique for using an extinguisher properly, which is called the **P.A.S.S.** technique:

P. – Pull the pin that secures the handle.

A. – Aim the extinguisher nozzle at the base of the fire.

S. – Squeeze the handle. (Don't be shocked by the sound of the agent as it is released).

S. – Sweep the agent or chemical from side to side across the base of the fire until it is completely out. Be on the alert for a reignition. If this happens, douse the fire until the extinguisher is completely empty.

Once you have the fire out, back carefully away from the scene. This will enable you to know immediately if the fire reignites.

Knowing how to use a fire extinguisher the right way is an important skill. But, sometimes, with your best effort, your attempt may fail or come up short of your extinguishing goal. If you do fail to extinguish the fire or if the blaze repeatedly keeps catching up, **evacuate the area immediately.**

A good hint, hopefully that you won't ever have to use, but will be beneficial just in case, is to get familiar with your work areas and the potential fire hazards that are present. Know the types of fires that are present in your area, and then you can be sure to have the proper types of extinguishers available. In a comprehensive safety program, these items should be listed.

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