

Fire Extinguisher Facts



A fire extinguisher can be used to put out a small, contained fire, or to create a path to safety.

Choosing & Maintaining a Fire Extinguisher

- Choose a UL-listed fire extinguisher based on your home's needs: living area, kitchen, garage, etc. Keep in mind that bigger is better. The higher the rating, the more firefighting power you will have.
- Select an extinguisher with an easy-to-read pressure gauge and clear instructions.
- Check your gauge at least monthly to make sure the extinguisher is pressurized – if the gauge reads "EMPTY" it is not pressurized and needs to be replaced.
- Install a fire extinguisher within reach on every level of your home. The National Fire Protection Association recommends installing at least a 2-A:10-B:C extinguisher for every 40 feet of your home. For garage/workshop, the NFPA recommends using a 3-A:40-B:C extinguisher.
- Replace your fire extinguisher if the gauge reads "EMPTY," immediately after use or if 12 years old. 80% of residential fire extinguishers sold today are single-use extinguishers that cannot be recharged.
- Read the instructions and understand your extinguisher's operation before a fire starts.
- Consider purchasing a smaller extinguisher to practice with before an emergency occurs.
- Respect all fires regardless of size. The main objective is a safe escape.

Stand 6 to 8 feet away from the fire and follow the four-step PASS procedure:

- P - Pull the pin and hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you.
A - Aim low at the base of the fire.
S - Squeeze the lever slowly and evenly to discharge the extinguishing agent. (When the agent first hits the fire, the fire may briefly flare up. This should be expected.)
S - Sweep the nozzle from side to side, moving carefully toward the fire. Keep the extinguisher aimed at the base of the fire.

Use Safely

Only use your extinguisher after making sure:

- All residents of the home have evacuated
- The fire department has been notified
- There is a clear exit behind the person using the extinguisher
- The fire is small and self-contained, the room is not filled with smoke, or if you need to create a safe pathway out of the home.

Ratings & Classes

There are three general classes of residential fire extinguishers:

- Class A: For fires involving ordinary combustibles such as wood, cloth, paper, rubber and plastics. They are common in typical home settings.
- Class B: For fires involving flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, solvents and oil-based paint. Class B fires often spread rapidly. Unless properly suppressed, they can re-flash after the flames have been extinguished.
- Class C: For fires involving energized electrical equipment.

A fire extinguisher's rating incorporates the different classes and measures the unit's firefighting capability. The higher the numbers, the more firefighting power the extinguisher has. For example, an extinguisher rated 3-A:40-B:C is approximately three times more powerful against class A fires and four times more powerful against class B fires than a unit rated 1-A:10-B:C.

Remember:

Fire extinguishers are just one part of an overall home fire safety plan. Families also should install working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on every floor and near sleeping areas, and develop and practice a fire escape plan.