

Safety & Health Training: Portable Fire Extinguisher Requirements and Best Practices

Stopping fires before they spread may prevent injury, death, and property loss. Both the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in [29 CFR 1910.157](#) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in [NFPA 10](#) establish fire extinguisher training requirements. This one pager summarizes training requirements for educating your workforce on fire extinguishers.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

You must have a fire extinguisher training program in place when you have fire extinguishers in your organization. Training must occur upon initial employment, and annually thereafter. Be sure to document all training.

All employees must understand the availability of portable fire extinguishers in their work areas and what to do if a fire emergency occurs. If you permit employees to operate fire extinguishers during an emergency, they must be knowledgeable on the hazards involved with fighting a fire, extinguisher selection, and safe operation of appropriate extinguishing equipment. Some employees may also have responsibilities to inspect, maintain, or test your extinguishers. These inspectors need educated on what to look for during inspections and testing. It is a good idea to train your employees on the “RACE” and “PASS” acronyms:

| WHAT TO DO DURING A FIRE | PROPER USE OF A FIRE EXTINGUISHER |
|---|--|
| RACE | PASS |
| R ESCUE all people in danger | P ULL the pin |
| A LERT others, activate alarms, and call 911 | A IM the nozzle |
| C ONTAIN the fire | S QUEEZE the trigger |
| E XTINGUISH the fire/evacuate to safety | S WEEP the nozzle from side to side |

READY ACCESSIBILITY

Fire extinguishers must be readily accessible so employees can access them during an emergency. Your fire extinguisher inspectors can look for ease of accessibility. Train your inspectors to verify fire extinguishers are mounted securely, easy to locate, and identified with a visible, readable sign, and not blocked by storage, materials, equipment, or other objects.

DID YOU KNOW?






The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Section 2861, reinstated the requirement for installation of portable fire extinguishers in DoD buildings, even those with a fire suppression or alarm system. The requirement was updated in the Unified Facilities Criteria, Fire Protection Engineering for Facilities, section 9 -17.1 and states: “General purpose portable fire extinguishers must be provided where required by NFPA 101.” Double check to ensure your organization supports this requirement.



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SELECTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Train your fire extinguisher users and inspectors on fire classifications and extinguisher types. Inspectors can also confirm the placement of fire extinguishers (maximum travel distance) to further support ready accessibility.

| Fire Classification | Extinguisher Type | Maximum Travel Distance to Extinguisher |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
|  Ordinary Combustibles | Water or Dry Chemical* | 75 feet |
|  Flammable Liquids | CO ₂ or Dry Chemical | 50 feet |
|  Energized Electrical Equipment | CO ₂ or Dry Chemical | Based on pattern for existing Class A or B hazards |
|  Combustible Metals | Special extinguishers labeled "D" | 75 feet |
|  Kitchen Fires | 2-A Water Type or 6L Wet Chemical | 30 feet |

* If marked multiple purpose for A, B, and C fires

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INSPECTION, MAINTENANCE, & TESTING

Your organization is responsible for inspecting, maintaining, and testing fire extinguishers in your workplace and you must have procedures in place to support these processes. Many organizations rely on the Fire Department, building managers, or trained employees to conduct monthly inspections. The Fire Department or third-party service provider generally perform annual in-depth maintenance examination checks, as well as required hydrostatic testing when necessary. Train those involved in the inspection, maintenance, and testing of your extinguishers on what to look for, any procedures in place, and documentation requirements so they can fulfill their duties. Review the table below for examples of procedures to incorporate into your training.

| <u>MONTHLY VISUAL INSPECTION</u> | <u>ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CHECK AND TESTING</u> |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visually inspect each fire extinguisher for obvious damage, needed repairs, and missing parts • Check the pressure gauge and verify it is charged • Document inspection date and inspector initials on the fire extinguisher tag | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct annual maintenance to check for required maintenance or repairs • Review hydrostatic testing frequency requirements – the type of fire extinguishers you have determines when trained personnel need to test them • Record repairs or testing conducted and the inspection date on the fire extinguisher tag |

BEST PRACTICES

Consider these best practices to enhance your fire extinguisher training. Simulated fire training offers personnel hands-on training without the dangers of exposure to a real fire. Pairing your simulated training with classroom or computer-based training helps employees retain their skills. Knowledge checks gauge the effectiveness of provided training. Finally, schedule annual emergency drills in conjunction with fire extinguisher training.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website: <https://www.smscx.org/>.