Putting Out Fires



What’s at Stake?

Workplace fire safety is about preventing fires from starting – but also vital is dealing with a fire when it does start.

If fire breaks out in your workplace, do you know what to do?

1. Your first responsibility is escape, for you and other occupants of the area.
2. Second in order of importance is calling for in-plant or community firefighters.
3. The third thing to do is try to put out the fire with an extinguisher – if you are trained to do so safely.

What’s the Danger?

You must sound the alarm for any fire. Don’t put yourself and others in danger by underestimating a fire and assuming you can take care of it alone. Instead, give everyone a chance to escape and the firefighters a head start on handling it.

How to Protect Yourself

Once evacuation is underway and firefighters have been summoned, you can consider tackling the fire with an extinguisher – if you know how to use one and if you won’t be putting yourself in danger.

You need to be trained to use a fire extinguisher because doing it wrong can make things worse.

Different fire extinguishers are designed for use on different kinds of fires; you must use the correct one:

1. Class A extinguishers are for use on ordinary combustibles such as wood, cloth, paper, rubber and plastics.
2. Class B extinguishers are for use on flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, grease, oil-based paint, lacquer, varnishes, solvents and fuels.

3. Class C extinguishers are for use on energized electrical equipment such as wiring, circuit breakers, machinery, appliances, computers and other electronics.
4. Class D extinguishers are used in specialized workplaces on flammable solids such as powdered metals.
5. Class K extinguishers were developed for modern, high efficiency deep fat fryers in commercial cooking operations.

And here is how:

Get ready. Remove the extinguisher from the mounting bracket. Stand about six feet (two meters) from the fire. Point the nozzle toward the fire and use the PASS method:

1. **P**ull out the pin securing the handle.
2. **A**im the nozzle at the base of the fire.
3. **S**queeze the handle.
4. **S**weep the stream of extinguishing agent from side to side across the base of the fire until it is completely out.

Remember these important points:

- Watch for the fire to re-ignite. If it does, continue to apply extinguishing agent until the extinguisher is empty.
- Hands on training and practice with an extinguisher before you have to use it in an emergency is important. You need to have experience pulling the pin and get accustomed to the weight and velocity of the extinguisher.
- You also need to be aware of the importance of using the right extinguisher. For instance, putting water on a Class B (flammable liquid) fire can spread it instead of extinguishing it. Water on a Class C, electrical fire can result in fatal electric shock.

Final Word

When you use an extinguisher, your own safety is your first responsibility. Make sure you have a clear path to an exit. Don’t let the fire get between you and your escape route. Never turn your back on a fire, even if you think it is out.