

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. Employees authorized to operate fire extinguishers during an emergency must be knowledgeable on the hazards involved with fighting a fire, extinguisher selection, and safe operation of appropriate extinguishing equipment. Some of your employees may also have responsibilities to inspect, maintain, or test your extinguishers. Educate and verify these inspectors know what to look for during inspections and testing. It is a good idea to train all 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 assess the ease of accessibility. Train your inspectors to verify your 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, requires the 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. Your 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 written procedures to support these processes. Many organizations rely on the fire department, building managers, or trained employees to conduct monthly inspections. The fire department or a third-party service provider generally perform annual maintenance inspections, as well as required hydrostatic testing, when necessary. Train personnel involved in fire extinguisher inspection, maintenance, and testing on what to look for, organizational procedures, and documentation requirements so they can fulfill their duties. Review the table below for example procedures to incorporate into your fire extinguisher 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 add inspector initials on the fire extinguisher tag	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct annual maintenance• Review hydrostatic testing frequency requirements determined by the fire extinguisher type• Record testing, any repairs, and the inspection date on the fire extinguisher tag

BEST PRACTICES

Consider these best practices to enhance your fire extinguisher training. Simulated fire and fire extinguisher 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. Conduct post-training knowledge checks and gauge the effectiveness of the provided training. Finally, schedule annual emergency drills in conjunction with fire extinguisher training.

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