



Using A Fire Extinguisher

Details vary among models of portable fire extinguishers - be familiar with the design of the unit you purchase before you are required to use it. There is no time to read the instructions when a fire flares up!

Portable fire extinguishers are designed to fight small fires (i.e. in a wastebasket) and only if the fire is caught right away. They are not suitable for large, spreading or established fires. Most sold for domestic use have a short range of about 6 to 10 feet (2 to 3 metres) and they can be completely discharged in an extremely short time, 8 to 10 seconds.

Favourable conditions to use a portable fire extinguisher

Portable extinguishers are useful only under certain conditions:

- The person using the extinguisher must know how to use it BEFORE there is a fire.
- The person using the extinguisher must be a mature and competent adult. It is not wise to "teach" or encourage children to use an extinguisher.
- The person using the extinguisher must be strong enough to both lift and operate it. Most modern extinguishers available for household use are lightweight and easy to operate. Extinguishers found in offices and factories and older models are often heavier and larger than household ones.
- Make sure the extinguisher is rated for the type of fire you are fighting. Fire extinguishers are designed to fight certain classes of fire. See [Fire Extinguishers](#). The type of extinguisher used depends on the type of fire burning. When purchasing an extinguisher, make sure it will put out the types of fires most likely to occur where the extinguisher is located. Using the wrong extinguisher can put you in an extra dangerous position, with splattering grease or an electrical shock.
- Make sure the extinguisher is large enough to put out the fire. Fire extinguishers come in various sizes and, generally, the larger the model the bigger the fire it will douse.

Fighting a fire...

When fighting a fire with any portable extinguisher, remember the word **PASS**.

PULL the pin. This unlocks the operating lever and allows you to discharge the extinguisher. Some extinguishers may have other lever-release mechanisms.

AIM low. Point the extinguisher nozzle, hose or horn at the base of the fire.

SQUEEZE the lever above the handle. This releases the extinguishing agent. Releasing the lever will stop the discharge. (Some extinguishers have a button instead of a lever.)

SWEEP from side to side. Moving carefully toward the fire, keep the extinguisher aimed at the base of the fire and sweep back and forth until the flames appear to be out. Watch the fire area. If the fire reignites, repeat the process.

Things to Remember...

Begin fighting the fire from a safe distance. Exposing yourself to extreme heat by being too close to the flames is dangerous and the pressure from the extinguisher may cause the fire to spread. Avoid direct exposure to smoke as much as possible. If smoke obstructs your vision or threatens to engulf your escape route, do not attempt to fight the fire. Leave the fire, close off the area to prevent the spread of smoke and fire, and wait for the arrival of the fire department.

Important: Even if you think you have extinguished the fire, it could flare up again. Have the fire department inspect all fire scenes.

When to fight a small fire

Before you begin to fight a fire be sure of the following:

- Everyone has left, or is leaving, the building.
- The fire department has been called or is being called.
- The fire is confined to a small area and is not spreading.
- Your back is toward an unobstructed exit (in other words, the exit is behind you) through which you can escape easily. You must always assume that you may not be able to extinguish the fire you are fighting. If the fire does not diminish with your first attack or if anything goes wrong, leave the building immediately and do not return.
- There is not much smoke in the room. Firefighters wear protective breathing equipment because of the dangers of smoke inhalation. Without protection, you may quickly find yourself unable to breathe or see. Smoke can also obscure your exit path.

It is reckless to fight a fire in any other circumstances. Instead, leave immediately, close off the area to slow the spread of the fire and smoke, and wait for the fire department to arrive.