

Spot The Safety Violation: A Fire Extinguisher Only for Tall People



In the event of a fire or explosion, how tall do you think you'd have to be to access this fire extinguisher'

When it comes to emergency preparedness, one of the most basic pieces of safety equipment to have on hand is a fire

extinguisher. But having extinguishers in the workplace is pointless if workers can't get to them when needed.

The rationale behind the alarming location of the fire extinguisher in this picture from the US Naval Safety Center is anyone's guess. If a fire broke out, only very tall workers would be able to easily and quickly access it. Other workers would need a ladder or step stool to reach the extinguisher. And finding a ladder and putting it in place can cost valuable time in an emergency.

Example: A welder in New Brunswick was welding a pipe in a warehouse from an elevated platform. When a fire broke out, there wasn't a fire extinguisher nearby. By the time he found one, the fire had engulfed the warehouse and a worker died. *Lesson:* Compliance with the requirement that a fire extinguisher be readily available where welding is performed could've saved this worker's life.

Bottom line: Fire extinguishers need to be fully charged, inspected and within easy reach of *all* workers.

The ABCD's of Portable Fire Extinguishers

According to Fire Prevention Canada, fire extinguishers are storage containers for an agent such as a dry chemical, foam, carbon dioxide or water. They're designed to put out small fires not large ones.

Extinguishers are labelled A, B, C or D. Makes sure that your workplace has the right extinguishers for the appropriate types of fire likely to occur in it:

- **Class A:** For fires started with ordinary combustibles, such as paper, wood, drapes and upholstery.
- **Class B:** For fires originating from flammable and combustible liquids, such as fuel oil, gasoline, paint, grease in a frying pan and solvents.
- **Class C:** For fires started from electrical equipment,

including wiring, overheated fuse boxes, conductors and other electrical sources.

- **Class D:** For fires involving certain metals such as magnesium and sodium that require a special dry powder extinguisher.

A multi-purpose dry chemical labelled ABC puts out most types of fires, including those involving wood, paper, cloth, flammable liquids and electrical fires.

Other important facts about fire extinguishers:

- Whatever type you buy, it should be labelled by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.
- The higher the number rating on the extinguisher, the more fire it puts out. High-rated extinguishers are often 'but not always' heavier. Ensure that your extinguishers aren't too heavy for the average worker to use comfortably.
- Recharge a fire extinguisher after ANY use. A partially used extinguisher might as well be empty.
- Extinguishers should be installed near an escape route and away from potential fire hazards.

In addition, you must make sure that workers know how to use a fire extinguisher. The key to correctly operating a fire extinguisher is the mnemonic device 'PASS':

1. **P**ull the pin. Some units require the releasing of a lock latch, pressing a puncture lever, inversion or other motion.
2. **A**im the extinguisher nozzle at the base of the fire.
3. **S**queeze or press the handle.
4. **S**weep the extinguisher from side-to-side at the base of the fire and discharge the contents of the extinguisher.

For more information, tools and other resources for protecting your workers in the event of a fire or other emergency, go to

the OHS Insider's [Emergency Preparedness & Response Compliance Centre](#) for:

- [8 emergency preparedness and response tips](#)
- Information on complying with the [fire preparedness requirements](#) in the OHS laws
- A [fire safety assessment form](#)
- A [fire safety checklist for industrial workplaces](#)
- A [fire safety checklist for offices](#).