

Spot The Safety Violation: Can You Find the Fire Extinguisher?



In the event of a fire, how quickly do you think you'd be able to find 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 won't do you any good if workers can't quickly find and access them when needed.

This picture from the US Naval Safety Center is a good example of where NOT to place a fire extinguisher. If a fire broke out, workers would have a hard time locating the red extinguisher, especially given that it's hidden among red kitchen utensils. And the fire extinguisher sign placed high up on the wall doesn't help very much, does it'

In an emergency, wasting valuable time trying to find a fire

extinguisher can be costly.

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.

Bottom line: Fire extinguishers should be readily and easily available in the workplace.

The ABCD's of Portable Fire Extinguishers

According to Fire Prevention Canada, fire extinguishers contain agents 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. Make sure that your workplace has the right extinguishers for the types of fires most 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:

- Only use fire extinguishers 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. Makes sure 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 escape routes and away from potential fire hazards.

You should also 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.