

# Spot The Safety Violation: I've Almost Got It?



**If a fire broke out, how easily would workers'especially short ones'be able to reach this fire extinguisher'**



In the event of a fire, especially a small one, it's critical to have fire extinguishers available in the workplace. But these basic pieces of safety equipment are useless if workers can't get to them easily and quickly when needed.

This picture illustrates a poor location for a fire extinguisher. You can see the appeal of the location'after all, it's basically unused space and the extinguisher isn't in anyone's way.

But should a fire break out, workers might not even remember that there's a fire extinguisher on top of these cabinets (out of sight, out of mind). And if they *do* remember, many workers wouldn't be able to reach the extinguisher without standing on a ladder or stool. And any delay in getting and using the extinguisher could be costly.

For 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

accessible 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. Makes sure that your workplace has the appropriate 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.

Ensure 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, discharging its contents.



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. So make sure 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.