

Spot The Safety Violation: Running on Empty



If a fire broke out in your workplace, how useful would this fire extinguisher be?



Oct. 9-15, 2016 is Fire Prevention Week in Canada. Although this week is geared toward fire safety at home, it's still a good time to assess the fire prevention and safety measures in the your workplace, too.

For instance, if there's a fire, especially a small one, it's important to have fire extinguishers available in the workplace. But these basic pieces of safety equipment are useless if they're empty like the one in the picture.

Example: A fire broke out in the bedroom of a Toronto woman's apartment. The woman's uncle tried to use one of the fire extinguishers on the building's floor but it was almost empty and only discharged for a few seconds. The uncle ended up suffering second-degree burns trying to fight the fire, which quickly spread through the entire apartment.

So as a basic fire preparedness and response measure, make sure that your workplace has appropriate fire suppression and protection equipment, such as fire extinguishers, and ensure that this equipment is working properly. For example, regularly inspect your fire extinguishers to ensure that they're full, undamaged, etc.

And make sure that workers can easily find and access your extinguishers. The time spent trying to locate an extinguisher could mean the difference between life and death. (Also, make sure that extinguishers are located near areas where hot work such as welding is done.)

FIRE EXTINGUISHER BASICS

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 and drapes.
- **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.

Also, train workers on how to use a fire extinguisher. The key to correctly operating a fire extinguisher is the mnemonic device 'PASS':

Pull the pin. Some units require the releasing of a lock latch, pressing a puncture lever, inversion or other motion.

Aim the extinguisher nozzle at the base of the fire.

Squeeze or press the handle.

Sweep 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.

In addition, you can use this [fire safety assessment form](#) to assess all areas and aspects of your workplace that are relevant when it comes to fire safety. You can also use these forms to inspect your workplaces with an eye toward fire safety ([fire safety checklist for industrial workplaces](#) and [fire safety checklist for offices](#)).

Lastly, make sure that your [emergency exits and fire doors aren't blocked](#).