
Information about Fire Extinguishers

Each year, about 440 people in the U.S. die inside their home after trying to fight a fire with a fire extinguisher instead of getting out safely and calling the fire department. The reasons this happens, according to the National Fire Protection Association, are —

- They do not know how to properly use a fire extinguisher. Using a fire extinguisher properly requires training from professionals. Most people can not learn how to use a fire extinguisher by simply reading directions. It is even more difficult to read directions for the first time during an emergency.
- Not all fire extinguishers will work on all fires. Home fire extinguishers are made for very small fires that can be put out quickly.
- The fire is bigger than the extinguisher they tried to use was designed for.
- People try to fight fires for too long and are overcome by poisonous gasses produced by the fire.

The following are approved messages that Red Cross chapters should be providing to the public about fire extinguishers —

- The safest thing to do in case of a fire is to get away from it safely and call the fire department from another location away from the fire. Have a fire escape plan and an outside meeting place for your family. Practice your plan!
- It still is a good idea to place a fire extinguisher in your home near each place where fire may start, such as the kitchen, garage, workshop, barbecue area, etc. An extinguisher should only be used on a very small fire that can be put out quickly. Also, install smoke alarms and test them monthly. Replace batteries once a year or when the alarm does not sound when the unit is tested.
- Get a fire extinguisher that is rated A-B-C, which is designed for fires that most often occur at home. For more information on the type and size of fire extinguisher you need for specific locations in your home, contact your local fire department or Fire Marshal.
- Get training from your local fire department in how to use the fire extinguisher that you get. Not all fire extinguishers work in the same way, so it's important that you get training and practice with the same type of fire extinguisher that you may use.

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for replacing or recharging fire extinguishers.
- If you try to use a fire extinguisher on a fire and the fire is not out in 30 seconds, drop the extinguisher and get out.

We strongly recommend that Red Cross units not provide or sell fire extinguishers to the public due to liability concerns. In the event of a fire, any mishap, equipment malfunction, or improper use, could result in the Red Cross being drawn into litigation. Extinguishers vary in size and fire rating, and different extinguishers are needed for different fires. Information and training from a local fire department is required to guide the public on proper selection and use of a fire extinguisher. Generally, the Red Cross does not have this expertise and fire departments do, so it is best to refer the public to them for training.