

Knowing Your ABC's

Do you know your ABC's? I'm sure you do when it comes to the alphabet, but what about when it comes to portable fire extinguishers? It's one thing to know how to use an extinguisher, but do you know what type of fires your extinguisher is designed to fight? If a fire was to happen, would you be able to react with precision to attempt and extinguish the fire or recognize the danger is too great and immediately alarm others and evacuate the facility? Time is critical when a fire starts, as it can spread rapidly and put you and others in serious danger. Don't be caught off guard, be proactive and know your extinguishers capability in advance. That's why it is important to be prepared, so you can handle the situation safely.

Don't assume all portable fire extinguishers are the same. They can vary in size and intended use. The intended use can be identified by a letter or letters located on the side of the tank. The letter(s) represents the Class or Classes of fire the extinguisher is designed to handle. It's common for a portable fire extinguisher to be a multipurpose Class ABC extinguisher. That's because they are effective on all three of those types of fires. The ABC extinguisher is not an all-inclusive device, as there are other Classes outside of the ABC scope. So, with this in mind, let's take a look at what types of fires your Class ABC extinguisher is designed to put out:

- Class A (Identified by a triangle containing the letter A)
 - Ordinary Combustible Materials (trash, wood, paper)

- Class B (Identified by a square containing the letter B)
 - Flammable Liquids

- Class C (Identified by a circle containing the letter C)
 - Energized Electrical Equipment

Keep in mind this information is intended to simply familiarize you with the type of fires that a multipurpose Class ABC fire extinguisher is designed for. Other factors such as the fire size, for example, need to be taken into consideration before attempting to extinguish a fire. Proper fire extinguisher training relevant to verifying the extinguisher design, on-site extinguisher locations and how to use them should be conducted before attempting to use any extinguisher. It's important to remember that if a fire breaks out and you are unsure about the situation, don't risk it! If you don't have the confidence you can safely extinguish the fire, don't make a bad situation worse. Alarm others in the building of the fire and evacuate the facility to the predetermined assembly location.

References:

National Fire Protection Association, NFPA 10: Standards for Portable Fire Extinguishers, 2013 Edition

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