



## What to do in case of fire?

# Fire kills

Five minutes...a fire needs only five minutes to become big enough to require the intervention of fire fighters. Five minutes is the delay established by the fire prevention services of North America to reach a fire. It is also the standard set by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the organization that determines and publishes standards relating to fires in North America.

Therefore, you have very little time to react adequately. But there is plenty of time to take appropriate measures to avoid fires in the first place. Those measures concern **prevention**, **information** and **training** of workers.



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## THE APPROPRIATE EXTINGUISHER FOR EVERY CLASS OF FIRE

There should be portable extinguishers in all buildings not equipped with automatic sprinklers or fire hoses. If a particular location presents a higher risk of fire, one or more portable extinguishers should be installed.

**Please note: The portable extinguishers selected should correspond to the type of fire concerned (R-9, 4.5.1 - 4.5.2).** Signs on extinguishers indicate the class of fire they are best suited for. Some may be suitable for several classes of fire (e.g. AB, BS or ABC)

### Maintenance is essential!

Empty extinguishers are useless. Check their condition and level at least once a month.(S-2.1, r.9)

Ensure that extinguishers are placed at the location indicated in the emergency plan.

Cupboards housing extinguishers should never be locked except in special circumstances.

Extinguishers should be easily visible and accessible. No object should hide them from

view. It is recommended that they be placed along circulation areas.

Extinguishers can be stored on supports, in cupboards or on shelves; they can also be mounted on wheels.

Extinguishers should be shielded from impact and any possible damage.

Extinguishers weighing less than 18.14 kg (40 lb.) should be installed no higher than 1.5 meters (5 ft) from the floor (distance to top of extinguisher).

Those heavier than 18.14 kg should be placed lower. The top of the extinguisher should be no higher than 1.07 meters (3.5 ft). However, there should always be a space of 102 mm (4 in.) left between the floor and the bottom of the extinguisher.

The label describing proper operation should be on the front of the extinguisher. Normally, no other label should appear.





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## The first act of prevention

# Informed workers

To be safe in your workplace, you must know the classes of fire and prevention methods. Learn where fire extinguishers are located and how to use them. Make sure you know the **emergency plan** in place at your workplace. Finally, learn how to react when a fire starts.

### The ABCs of fires



#### Class A fires

Class A fires involve combustible or fibrous material such as wood, cloth, cotton and paper, or rubber and various types of plastics. (NFPA 10-1.3, 1998)

To prevent class A fires, clean the premises **regularly**. Place any rag soaked with combustible material in covered metal containers, well away from open flames. Empty every day.



#### Class B fires

Class B fires are caused by gases and flammable liquids such as fuel, propane, oils, grease, paints and paint thinners.

Use only flammable liquids in well-ventilated areas. At any other time they should be stored in tightly sealed containers, away from sources of sparks. (NFPA 10-1.3, 1998)



#### Class C fires

This type of fire occurs in activated electric devices equipped with a non-conductive extinguishing agent. (NFPA 10-1.3, 1998)

The inappropriate use of electric equipment is a major cause of fire. Old or frayed wiring as well as broken or damaged connections present fire hazards. Check their condition before use.

Keep electric motors clean and in good working condition. Inspect closely any device or equipment giving off an unpleasant or unusual smell. A motor that overheats can cause a fire.

Never install fuses with a higher caliber than recommended.

Use only portable lamps with a protection screen. Direct contact between the light bulb and a combustible material can start a fire.



#### Class D fires

Class D fires involve combustible metals such as magnesium, titanium, potassium, zirconium, sodium, lithium, etc. (NFPA 10-1.3, 1998)

In order to avoid class D fires, follow safety instructions set by your company regarding handling of combustible material.

#### Class K fires

Fires in cooking appliances that involve combustible cooking media (vegetable or animal oils and fats).



## The second act of prevention

# Preventive measures

Now you are ready! Workers know the different types of fires and the location of extinguishers; they also know how to use them. All is well. It is indeed a good start, but you must now make sure that the extinguishers are always in good condition, that they are full, in the right place, never hidden by other objects. In other words, you still have work to do.

### Inspections

The owner or tenant of a property where extinguishers are found is responsible for their inspection, maintenance and filling. It is recommended to designate a specific person to be in charge of inspections.

Once a month - or more if necessary - make a round of inspection to ensure that extinguishers are in the right place, clearly visible and easily accessible. Examine the instructions labels. Are they legible? Check the seal or handling indicator. Has it been damaged or removed?

If there are water extinguishers without a gauge, weigh them to make sure they are full. Examine the extinguisher to detect any breakage, corrosion, leak or outlet obstruction. Note any trouble and report without delay. Repairs must be quickly done.

### Follow-up

The people in charge of inspections should fill out and file a control sheet for every extinguisher in need of repairs. The sheet should include the date, the time and the initials of the person performing inspections.

Remember: **inspect once a month**  
Remember: **maintain once a year**

### Prepare an emergency plan

Despite all the precautions you have taken, a fire may break out. Will you know how to react? A good emergency plan can help.

A person or a team should be put in charge of drawing up the emergency plan, which should be written down and updated regularly. It should be posted on the work premises: this is compulsory. It will give all the information concerning the evacuation procedure and identify the people in charge of coordination.

More specifically, the plan should include the following elements:

- A description of emergency exits in every zone of the building
- A plan of the building
- Clear instructions for evacuation (posted in different locations)
- Identification of people in charge of specific duties
- Name of the evacuation coordinator
- A reminder that stairs should be kept clear of any object likely to block evacuation
- A schedule of emergency evacuation exercises at regular intervals

### Evacuation procedures

All workers should be aware of the evacuation procedures described in the emergency plan.

These procedures are to be strictly followed. Workers should remain calm and orderly.

Workers must leave the building as quickly as possible and never use the elevators, where they would be trapped in case of power failure.

The last person to leave a room should close the door without locking it.

Evacuate the building through the stairs. Once at ground level, exit the building.

If there is smoke or toxic fumes, crawl on the floor where there is more oxygen. Cover your nose and mouth with a damp cloth.

Once outside, make your way immediately to the area designated in the emergency plan and identify yourself. In this way all will know that you are safe and sound.



## What to do in case of fire?

### QUIZZ

- 1 To avoid class C fires, you must ensure that the wiring and connections are in good condition.
- 2 If you are the last person to leave a room on fire, you should close the door and lock it.
- 3 To avoid class B fires, store flammable liquids in a ventilated area, in sealed containers away from sources of sparks.
- 4 One extinguisher per room is sufficient.

true false



### Learn how to use a fire extinguisher

Learn the PPPS rule!

- P** Pull the trigger
- P** Point at the base of the flames
- P** Press the release mechanism
- S** Sweep the extinguisher from side to side, covering the entire surface of the fire

### While you wait for the fire fighters

Do not fight the fire:

if it is growing or if flames are threatening to block your one way out

if you cannot position yourself between the fire and an exit

if your equipment is inadequate

**Never take fire fighting lightly: ask for help!**

Answers:

- 1 T
- 2 F
- 3 T
- 4 F

### Viewing Material

**Les extincteurs portatifs.** Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Trois-Rivières, Québec, 1983, VHS, 15 minutes

**Fire extinguishers: fight or flight?** National Fire Protection Association, Boston, Mass.: Urbanimage Filmvideo, 1988, VHS, 16 minutes (guidebook)

**How to select and safely use portable fire extinguishers.** Idea Bank, 1997, VHS, 10 minutes (guidebook)

**Quoi faire en cas d'incendie?** Centre national de prévention et de protection, Paris: CNPP, France, VHS, 10 minutes

**Les risques d'incendie dans les usines: prévention.** Production video L.M., Sainte-Catherine, Québec, 1992, VHS, 24 minutes

**Les incendies,** Société Radio-Canada, Montreal, 1988, VHS, 28 minutes

**Prévention des incendies,** Leighton & Kidd Limited, VHS, 27 minutes

**Prévention des incendies: ne courez pas ce risque,** Coastal Video Communications, 1996, VHS, 21 minutes

### Reading Material

**Factory Mutual System:** *Comment se servir des extincteurs portatifs*, United States, 7 pages

**Association paritaire pour la santé et la sécurité du travail – secteur services automobiles:** *Les extincteurs portatifs: sauriez-vous faire face à un incendie dans votre établissement?* Montreal, 1987, 6 pages

**Association française de normalisation:** *Maintenance des extincteurs d'incendie portatifs*, Paris la Défense, AFNOR, 1998, 20 pages

**Publications du Québec:** *Norme concernant les extincteurs d'incendie portatifs*, 1986, NFPA: 10-1984

**Direction générale de la prévention des incendies:** *Normes sur les extincteurs d'incendie portatifs NFPA 10-1981*, 1982, 125 pages

**Industrial Accident Prevention Association:** *Fire extinguishers*, Toronto, 11 pages

**Conseil canadien des normes, Laboratoire des assureurs du Canada:** *Standard for the rating and fire testing of fire extinguishers and class extinguishing media*, Third edition, Scarborough, Ontario, 1990, 21 pages

**National Fire Protection Association:** *Standard for portable fire extinguishers*, Quincy, MA, 1998

Next Issue:  
**Physical training at work**

Verify the field of application of all standards, laws and regulations in order to determine if they apply to your situation