Monthly Safety Training

**Fire Extinguisher**

*By Sue Schauls*

OSHA rule 29 CFR 1910.157 states that an employer shall provide approved portable fire extinguishers and shall mount, locate and identify them so that they are readily accessible to employees without subjecting the employees to possible injury.

Fire extinguishers must be maintained in a fully charged and operable condition and kept in their designated places at all times except during use. Fire extinguishers for employee use should be selected and distributed based on the classes of anticipated workplace fires and on the size and degree of hazard which would affect their use. **A multi-purpose ABC rated fire extinguisher is appropriate for an automotive repair operation.**

## Inspection Requirements

* **Inspect Monthly** - Portable fire extinguishers shall be visually inspected monthly.

## Conduct Annual Maintenance - Fire extinguishers are subjected to an annual maintenance check. Record the annual maintenance date and retain this record for one year after the last entry. Hire a professional.



Stored pressure dry chemical extinguishers that require a 12-year hydrostatic test must be emptied and recharged every 6 years. Dry chemical extinguishers having non-refillable disposable containers are exempt from this requirement.

So many of the multi-purpose *inexpensive* fire extinguishers are on the manufacturer’s recall list that it only makes sense to **use a professional fire extinguisher service to protect your employees and your business**. Provide adequate protection such as back up fire extinguisher when portable fire extinguishers are removed from service for maintenance and recharging.

## Training and education

Provide an educational program for employees to familiarize employees with the general principles of fire extinguisher use and the hazards involved with incipient stage fire fighting. Provide training upon initial employment and at least annually thereafter. Hands-on practice may be conducted using fire extinguishers scheduled for recharging or those on recall lists.

## Recordkeeping

## Record the annual maintenance date and retain this record for one year after the last entry or the life of the shell, whichever is less. Record monthly visual inspections and keep with the fire extinguisher for easy record keeping. Then save the tag from the previous year along with the annual inspection tag.

Present this Fire Extinguisher training to employees as this month’s Safety Training topic. Following the presentation, have each employee sign a training log. A sample log can be downloaded at <http://www.ccar-greenlink.org/EmployeeSafetyTrainingLog.pdf>. Keep the monthly Safety Training Record on file (such as in the RED MSDS binder) in the event of an OSHA inspection.

**Conduct Employee Training**

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| **Review Fire Extinguisher Ratings.** A multi-purpose ABC fire extinguisher is appropriate for an auto salvage yard.Every employee should know the locations of the fire extinguisher(s) on-site at the facility.  |
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| A-2 | **Class A Extinguishers** will put out fires in ordinary combustibles, such as wood and paper. The numerical rating for this class of fire extinguisher refers to the amount of water the fire extinguisher holds and the amount of fire it will extinguish. | A-1 |
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| B-2 | **Class B Extinguishers** should be used on fires involving flammable liquids, such as grease, gasoline, oil, etc. The numerical rating for this class of fire extinguisher states the approximate number of square feet of a flammable liquid fire that a non-expert person can expect to extinguish. | B-1 |
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| C-2 | **Class C Extinguishers** are suitable for use on electrically energized fires. This class of fire extinguishers does not have a numerical rating. The presence of the letter “C” indicates that the extinguishing agent is non-conductive. | C-1 |
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|  | **Class D Extinguishers** are designed for use on flammable metals and are often specific for the type of metal in question. There is no picture designator for Class D extinguishers. These extinguishers generally have no rating nor are they given a multi-purpose rating for use on other types of fires. | d-1 |

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Fire becomes more dangerous by the second. Firefighters advise that evacuation comes first if there are others that need care such as the physically impaired or children. The time-tested rule holds: **Once you've gotten everybody out, don't go back.**

**Evacuate when any of the following occurs:**

1. The extinguisher is out but the fire is not.
2. You sense that it's a lost cause, even if the fire extinguisher is still working.
3. The room is filled with smoke.
4. It appears that the fire is going to block your exit at any moment. Remember, you always fight a fire with your back to a clear exit. Never let flames get between you and your way out. If need be, clear the exit path, then get out.

Having the right fire extinguisher readily available is the first step in preventing a fire from spreading. Knowing where the fire extinguisher is located and how to use is it is important.

Use the **PASS** system when fighting fires - *Remove extinguisher from mounting*

**P**: Pull the pin – this allows you to activate the extinguisher
**A**: Aim the extinguisher at the fire's base – hold hose & point at the fire’s base

**S**: Squeeze the handle – the trigger mechanism to release the extinguishing agent
**S**: Sweep the extinguisher back and forth –at the base of the fire

Remember, you always fight a fire with your back to a clear exit. Never let flames get between you and your way out. If need be, clear the exit path, then get out.



**Rule for Fires**

Fires are very dangerous - Be certain that you will not endanger yourself or others when attempting to put out a fire.

* **Call 911**
* **Assist anyone in danger**

**1. Never fight a fire if you don't know what is burning -** If you don't know what is burning, you don't know what type of extinguisher to use. Even if you have an ABC extinguisher, there may be something in the fire that could explode or produce highly toxic smoke.

**2. Never fight a fire if the fire is spreading rapidly beyond the spot where it started -** The time to use an extinguisher is in the incipient, or beginning, stages of a fire. If the fire is already spreading quickly, it is best to simply evacuate the building, closing doors and windows behind you as you leave.

**3. Never fight a fire if you don't have adequate or appropriate equipment -** If you don't have the correct type or large enough extinguisher, it is best not to try to fight the fire.

**4. Never fight a fire if you might inhale toxic smoke -** If the fire is producing large amounts of smoke that you would have to breathe in order to fight it, it is best not to try. Gases from man-made materials can be fatal in very small amounts.

**5. Never fight a fire if your instincts tell you not to -** If you are uncomfortable with the situation for any reason, just let the fire department do their job.

**6. The final rule is to always position yourself with an exit or means of escape at your back before you attempt to use an extinguisher to put out a fire -** In case the extinguisher malfunctions, or something unexpected happens, you need to be able to get out quickly, and you don't want to become trapped.

**Always keep an exit at your back.**



Sue Schauls is an independent environmental consultant with automotive expertise. She is the Environmental & Safety Consultant for CCAR-GreenLink the EPA automotive compliance assistance center. She is the Executive Director & regulatory consultant for the Iowa Automotive Recyclers (IAR), she developed and implements the **I**owa – **C**ertified **A**uto **R**ecyclers **E**nvironmental (I-CARE) Program. She contributes articles to several trade publications and is a member of ARA Technical Advisory and Certified Auto Recyclers Committees. Sue has a bachelors of Arts degree in *Science: Environmental Planning* from the University of Northern Iowa, 1996.