

## October is Fire Prevention Month!

Now is the perfect time to discuss portable fire extinguishers. Fire extinguishers are extremely important as they are the most commonly used form of fire protection. In many cases they are the first line of defense in preventing costly property damage.

On occasion, employees and business owners view fire extinguishers as a red ornament simply hanging on the wall. Fire extinguishers however, serve a very useful purpose. According to the National Association of Fire Equipment Distributors, in 2010 95% of all reported fires were extinguished using fire extinguishers.

Northwestern provides and maintains portable fire extinguishers in every building. These extinguishers are easily accessible and can be found in a variety of campus locations such as laboratories, corridors, and stairwells. Federal safety and health regulations require that fire extinguishers be located at least 75 feet from building occupants, and even closer if the area in question contains greater hazards such as flammable or combustible materials.

The most common fire extinguisher you will find on the Northwestern campus is the ABC dry powder fire extinguisher. This type of extinguisher is designed to handle many types of fires that may develop as the result of burning trash, wood, paper, liquids, gases, solvents and electrical equipment. Regardless of the type of extinguishers located on campus, all extinguishers should have operating instructions to help guide you.

### Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

- **Preparation is Key:** Have plan on what to do ahead of time. Work with coworkers so everyone is on the same page.
- **Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to keep a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what is wrong or has gone wrong in the past.
- **Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Story telling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from employees make the topic even more relatable.

### When Should You Use a Fire Extinguisher

Using a fire extinguisher without taking the proper precautions can put you and everyone in the building at risk. Before using a fire extinguisher, make sure the fire is contained and it is not spreading around the area. Never put yourself in danger when trying to extinguish a fire. Always keep the exit to your back when extinguishing a fire. If you don't feel comfortable using a fire extinguisher or if the fire spreads, close the door as you exit, activate the fire alarm system, call 911 and evacuate the building.

Using a fire extinguisher is not complicated, and shouldn't be when you are extinguishing a fire. To help you more get more comfortable, remember the acronym PASS: Pull.Aim.Squeeze.Sweep. The full instruction is to PULL the pin at the top of the extinguisher, AIM the nozzle at the base of the fire and SQUEEZE the level on the extinguisher. SWEEP the nozzle from side to side to cover the area of the fire.

To gain more experience with using an extinguisher, Risk Management provides hands on live fire extinguisher training to ensure employees and students know how to operate an extinguisher. To find out more about fire extinguisher training, contact [Risk Management](#) for information.

*Preparation and training are key:*

Learn more: Complete *Portable Fire Extinguisher* training at [learn.northwestern.edu](http://learn.northwestern.edu).



## Fire Prevention at Home?

Fires can happen just as easily at home. According to the NFPA, 27% of reported fires occurred in the home during 2012–2016. Below are a few fire prevention tips.

- ✓ Purchase an ABC dry powder extinguisher for your home..
- ✓ Make sure the extinguisher is easily accessible.
- ✓ NFPA recommends a fire extinguisher be kept on every floor of your home.
- ✓ If you can only have one extinguisher, make sure to keep it in the kitchen. Cooking appliances account for 48% of all home fires. It is recommended that you change your fire extinguishers every 5 years.
- ✓ In some instances Insurance companies may provide discounts to home owners who maintain fire extinguishers at home.
- ✓ Have a plan at home. Know at least 2 ways out of each room.
- ✓ In the event of a fire, close doors behind you as you leave.
- ✓ Designate a safe place to meet once outside.

### For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at [gwen.butler@northwestern.edu](mailto:gwen.butler@northwestern.edu) for details.