

## Portable Fire Extinguisher Safety

Fires are among the deadliest workplace hazards. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 1,200 fire-related injuries and 120 fire-related deaths occur in the workplace every year in the U.S.

### The First Line of Defense

Portable fire extinguishers are one of the most effective tools in ensuring a small fire doesn't turn into a major event. In fact, fire extinguishers effectively put out more than 80% of all fires, according to the Fire Extinguisher Trades Association. This is because most fires start small and can often be contained or extinguished if attacked in the early stages.

To keep you and the Northwestern community safe, fire extinguishers are located in every building and you should become familiar with their location in your work areas. All extinguishers have operating instructions posted on them and will indicate which types of fires they should be used on.



Fire extinguishers were invented in 1818. The Great Chicago Fire in 1871 could have been prevented if there was a fire extinguisher in Mrs. O'Leary's barn!

### Fire Extinguisher Types and Uses



At Northwestern, portable fire extinguishers are inspected monthly to ensure they are in proper working order, fully-charged, and ready for immediate use. In addition, each one undergoes a thorough annual inspection by qualified technicians. We need your help to ensure items aren't stored in front of extinguishers and that they are clearly visible and readily accessible at all times. If you find a damaged, empty, or missing fire extinguisher, notify your supervisor or contact Facilities Management.

### When a Fire is Discovered...

You are not required to fight a fire, but you are expected to activate the building fire alarm or call 911, and to get yourself to safety. Once the building fire alarm is activated, the fire department is notified. When exiting, be sure to close doors behind you to contain the fire and smoke, which will help slow the spread of the fire. You may attempt to extinguish the fire if it is small and you are comfortable doing so. Be sure to always have a clear exit to safety and never put yourself in danger to fight a fire. *If in doubt, get out!*

### Be Prepared

Risk Management offers hands-on, live-fire extinguisher training in the spring and summer at the Evanston campus lakefill fire pit. Training is also available upon request for groups up to 15 and takes one hour. Contact [Jim La Vigne](mailto:Jim.LaVigne@northwestern.edu) at 847.467.7065 for details.

Do your part: Complete *Fire Extinguisher Safety* training at [learn.northwestern.edu](http://learn.northwestern.edu).

## Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

- **Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant to your work. With your team, review the portable fire extinguishers found in your workplace and discuss how they apply to your work.
- **Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.
- **Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

## Safety at Home

**Did you know?** Cooking, smoking, and portable heaters are the leading causes of fires in the home. Here are some tips to keep you and your family safe:

- Know your limitations – more than half of all cooking fire injuries occur when people are trying to fight fires themselves
- Don't leave cooking or heating equipment unattended
- Ensure a fire extinguisher is accessible on every level of your home
- Familiarize your family members with how to use fire extinguishers
- Inspect fire extinguishers monthly and check the gauge to ensure it is ready for immediate use
- Replace fire extinguishers that are more than 12 years old or after discharge

## For Additional Information

Please contact [Gwen Butler](mailto:Gwen.Butler@northwestern.edu), Director of Environmental Health and Safety, at 847.491.4936 with any questions.