



# PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

A Member of the Texas A&M University System

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OFFICE OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS MEMORANDUM No. FY09-74

Distributed via Campus Email

**TO:** Faculty and Staff

**FROM:** Mary Lee Hodge  
Vice President of Business Affairs

**RE:** The ABCs (and D) of Fire Extinguisher Safety

Although fire regulations require you to have fire extinguishers in your workplace, you don't necessarily have to train employees to use them. For example, if workers are told to sound the alarm and evacuate in the event of any workplace fire and leave fire fighting to professionals or fire brigade, then you don't have to complete fire extinguisher training (unless, of course, you want to, which is never a bad idea). But if you expect workers to take emergency action in the event of a workplace fire, then you have to train each and every one of them to use extinguishers safely and effectively.

**Fire extinguisher safety starts with the ABCs (and D).** Extinguishers are labeled to correspond to different classes of fires. It's essential for employees to choose the right type of extinguisher for the fire. Otherwise, they could be spreading the fire instead of extinguishing it.

- Extinguishers labeled with an A should be used for Class A fires, which involve paper, cardboard, wood, trash, rags, or cloth.
- Extinguishers labeled with a B are for Class B fires, which involve grease, gasses, or flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, solvents, and paint.
- Extinguishers labeled with a C should be used on Class C fires, which involve electrical equipment and wiring. Water-based extinguishers, such as Class A extinguishers, should never be used on an electrical fire!
- Extinguishers labeled with a D are for combustible metal fires, such as those involving aluminum, sodium, magnesium, or zinc.
- Multipurpose ABC extinguishers can be used for Class A, B, or C fires as well as for combination fires. These are the most common type found on campus.
- Extinguisher labels often have picture symbols in addition to letters to identify the class of fire the extinguisher can be used on. A red slash through a letter or picture symbol means you can't use the extinguisher on that type of fire.

**PASS the extinguisher.** Here's the proper procedure for using a fire extinguisher:

- Hold the extinguisher upright and stand 6 feet to 8 feet from the fire.
- Make sure there is a fire-free escape route open behind you in case you can't extinguish the fire and you need to evacuate.
- Then remember "PASS":
  - Pull the pin (on some extinguishers you have to press a lever).
  - Aim at the base of the fire.
  - Squeeze the handle to release the extinguishing agent.
  - Sweep back and forth until the fire goes out.

**When in doubt, get out!** Most workplace fires should be handled by trained firefighters--either your local fire department or your own fire brigade. Fire extinguishers should only be used on small, contained fires. That's because extinguishers don't last long and can't control big or rapidly spreading fires. So be sure your employees understand that if a fire doesn't go out immediately, they should evacuate the area, sound the alarm, and leave the job to better trained and equipped firefighters. Your workers should never try to extinguish large or rapidly spreading fires with an extinguisher.

#### **Why It Matters...**

- *Workplace fires can injure or kill employees and cause extensive damage to structures, equipment, and materials.*
- *Small fires can get out of hand quickly, so prompt response with a fire extinguisher can prevent damage and injuries.*
- *Using the wrong type of extinguisher on a fire could make the situation worse.*
- *If you expect employees to use fire extinguishers to put out workplace fires, then OSHA requires you to train them how to use extinguishers safely and effectively.*

**Environmental Health & Safety Department** may be contacted to schedule hands on fire extinguisher training for your Department at [EHS@PVAMU.EDU](mailto:EHS@PVAMU.EDU) or ext 1745/1746.

MLH/cpc

xc: Dr. George C. Wright