

Fire Extinguisher Safety

By Alan Achatz, CCM, CHE

Wherever we go, whether it is a sleek high rise building or corner diner, we see fire extinguishers. Do you know on how to use one? Would you be comfortable using one? Do you know what the letters PASS signify when addressing fire extinguisher training? Are you able to lift an extinguisher?

Regardless if your workplace is governed by the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration www.osha.gov, the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety <http://www.ccohs.ca/> or a different regulatory agency; you should decide whether or not you want your employees to use a fire extinguisher or evacuate in case of a fire.

Your Local Fire Marshall or Official is an Excellent Resource

Fire extinguisher training can be fun and need not be too expensive. Look at the date your fire extinguishers are due to expire; tell your service provider you want to use them up just prior to their expiration dates and then contact your fire marshall and ask him or her to bring a burn box.

You can have the fire marshall provide employee training in your parking lot. In my estimation, it shows those around you that you care about fire safety.

A thought to consider before commencing a program: Why not enclose a list of all the fire extinguisher locations in the paycheck envelopes announcing the training with a note stating you desire that the employees know the locations of ten extinguishers closest to where they work. On the training day, ask a volunteer to name ten and once he/she has done that, ask them to continue - each time another location is stated, give the person a \$5.00 bill. The additional \$50.00 (that it might cost) will have all employees realizing what you want them to know and don't be surprised when an employee asks when you are going to ask all of them to name the fire extinguisher locations. Now that's positive reinforcement!

The Training Day

Your fire marshall will go through all the specifics. The staff will learn the basics of extinguisher use. Most likely, the word PASS will be used to describe how to use an extinguisher:

- P - PULL the pin;
- A - AIM the extinguisher;
- S - SQUEEZE the handle;
- S - SWEEP the extinguishing medium back and forth over the fire.

Then each employee will have the opportunity to use an extinguisher. There is no better way to get the employees to learn how to do something than to have them do it! After the training is conducted, you'll be amazed at the comments you get from the staff. Need you train all employees? That is a decision you will have to make. You may want to designate a select group of first responders, yet I believe the training you do may benefit all employees at some time in their life. An excellent tool, "Test Your Knowledge," can be used for employees when

(continued on page 3)

Fire Extinguisher Safety

(continued from page 2)

you conduct your tests. The test is located at:
http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/portable_test.html.

If you commence a training program, recognize that you'll have to do it at least annually, as well as during initial hiring or when changing an employee's duties.

If you have the slightest doubt about your ability to fight a fire, EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY!

By all means, if you use the fire department during these training sessions, a donation is most appropriate and always welcome.

Types of Extinguishers -A, B, C, D and K

- A - for use on wood, paper and textiles
- B - for use on flammable liquids such as gasoline and oil, etc.
- C - for use on fires with live electrical equipment
- D - for use on combustible metals (magnesium, titanium, etc.)
- K - for use in the kitchen on fats, grease and oils

It seems the majority of extinguishers I see are combination ABC extinguishers. So, if an emergency arises, the extinguisher can readily be put to use on most any fire.

Parallel Programs

In the March 2005 issue of The Globe, I shared guidelines for evacuating a high rise building and noted that I would address fire extinguishers. If you are implementing a fire extinguisher training program, also ensure that you consider the need for an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) and a Fire Prevention Plan. Some excellent resources for these procedures can be found at <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/index.html>. Be sure to also check the index for Fire, Rescue & Medical Services when developing your EAP. This information is located at http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/fire_med_service.html.

A Closing Thought

Safe work practices need not be dictated by governmental agencies. They can simply be implemented because you want to know something or evolve through a common sense approach. All you need do is share your interest, allocate some money and involve your employees.

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