

Print

Close

**National Fire
Protection Association**

The authority on fire, electrical, and building safety

[Home](#) > [Research & Reports](#) > [Fact sheets](#) > [Fire extinguishers](#)

Fire extinguishers

A portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives; but portable extinguishers have limitations. Because fire grows and spreads so rapidly, the number one priority for residents is to get out safely.

Safety tips:

- Use a portable fire extinguisher when the fire is confined to a small area, such as a wastebasket, and is not growing; everyone has exited the building; the fire department has been called or is being called; and the room is not filled with smoke.
- To operate a fire extinguisher, remember the word PASS:
 - **P**ull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you, and release the locking mechanism.
 - **A**im low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.
 - **S**queeze the lever slowly and evenly.
 - **S**weep the nozzle from side-to-side.
- For the home, select a multi-purpose extinguisher (can be used on all types of home fires) that is large enough to put out a small fire, but not so heavy as to be difficult to handle.
- Choose a fire extinguisher that carries the label of an independent testing laboratory.
- Read the instructions that come with the fire extinguisher and become familiar with its parts and operation before a fire breaks out. Local fire departments or fire equipment distributors often offer hands-on fire extinguisher trainings.
- Install fire extinguishers close to an exit and keep your back to a clear exit when you use the device so you can make an easy escape if the fire cannot be controlled. If the room fills with smoke, leave immediately.
- Know when to go. Fire extinguishers are one element of a fire response plan, but the primary element is safe escape. Every household should have a home fire escape plan and working smoke alarms.

NFPA does not test, label or approve any products.

Updated: 11/01

URL: <http://www.nfpa.org/itemDetail.asp?categoryID=277&itemID=18264&URL=Research%20%20Reports/Fact%20sheets/Fire%20extinguishers>

NFPA (National Fire Protection Association)

1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169-7471 USA
Telephone: +1 617 770-3000 Fax: +1 617 770-0700