

## THE PacificComp TRAINER

### **FIRE SAFETY- FIGHT OR FLEE**

#### **Evacuation Plans and Procedures –fight or flee?**

Fire is one of the most common types of emergencies that a company can encounter. A necessary decision in planning for this emergency situation is whether or not employees should fight a fire with a portable fire extinguisher. Small fires can often be extinguished by a well-trained employee with a fire extinguisher, however, to do this safely, the employee must understand the uses and limitations of a portable fire extinguisher and the hazards associated with fighting fires.

#### **Should employees evacuate or be prepared to fight a small fire?**

The choice to evacuate the workplace will most effectively minimize the potential of fire-related injuries. In addition, employees who are trained to use and maintain portable fire extinguishers require considerable resources. On the other hand, you will want to consider the availability of a public fire department and the time it may take to respond as well as the vulnerability of egress routes when you are making a policy decision on this issue.

#### **Risk Assessment – when to fight a fire?**

Fire extinguishers are not designed to fight a large or spreading fire. Even against small fires, they are useful only under the right conditions.

An extinguisher must be large enough for the fire at hand. It must be available and in working order, fully charged. The operator should be familiar with the extinguisher so that it will not be necessary to read directions at the time of an emergency.

Subsequent to fighting any fire with a portable fire extinguisher, the people involved must perform a risk assessment that evaluates the size of the fire, the evacuation route that the fire extinguisher users will use, and the atmosphere in the vicinity of the fire.

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You should fight a fire with a fire extinguisher only when all of the following are true:

- Everyone has left or is leaving the building except an assistant, never fight a fire alone
- The fire is small and confined to the immediate areas where it started, such as, in a wastebasket, cushion, small appliance, stove, etc.
- The fire department has been called
- You can fight the fire with your back to a safe escape route
- Your extinguisher is rated for the type of fire you are fighting and is in good working order

Remember, if you have the slightest doubt about whether or not to fight the fire – **DO NOT FIGHT IT!** Instead, get out and close the door behind you to slow the spread of the fire. Set up and practice fire drills. Let the professional firefighters do their jobs.

### Buy Extinguishers Carefully

A fire extinguisher should be “labeled” and “listed” by an independent testing laboratory such as UL (Underwriters Laboratory) or FM (Factory Mutual). It should be rated for the type of exposure(s) anticipated. Class A is for ordinary combustibles material such as paper and wood, Class B is for flammable or combustible liquids such as gasoline, Class C is for electrical fires, Class D is for combustible metals such as magnesium and Class k is for kitchens and is designed to fight fires from cooking oils and animal fats. The higher the rating number on an **A, B, C, D** or **K** fire extinguisher, the more fire it can put out. Take into consideration the size so that you can hold and operate the extinguisher that you purchase. Remember that extinguishers must be recharged after every use. Each extinguisher should be installed in plain view near an escape route and away from potential fire hazards.

### Maintenance of Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers need to be professionally serviced annually. If the annual service tag is missing, the fire extinguisher needs to be re-serviced. Fire extinguishers need

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to be visually inspected once per month. The monthly visual inspection includes making sure the extinguisher is not over or under charged (gauge is in the green), the annual service tag is in place, the pin is in place and the extinguishers is where it is supposed to be. If all these items are in place, the inspector signs the back of the annual service tag.

With regard to home fire safety, you may need more than one extinguisher in your home. For example, you may want an extinguisher in the kitchen in addition to one in the garage or workshop. Remember to change the batteries in your smoke alarms every 6 months.