



## Handy Extinguisher Guide

Most places where people are employed to work (paid or unpaid) are required by legislation to have fire extinguishers fitted. Some properties where no one is employed also require them, places such as HMOs (Houses of Multiple Occupancy).

**Offices, Factories, warehouses, retail units, charity shops, café's, hotels, sports centres and pavilions** are among the many types of premises required to have fire extinguishers fitted under the current RRO – Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

### Why we Need Extinguishers

In the case of a small fire, an extinguisher is our first line of defence. Think of it as the sticking plaster you use when you cut yourself; just like the plaster prevents problems from developing, an extinguisher can deal with a small fire before it gets out of hand, however if the bleeding is serious you go to a doctor; if the fire is serious you need the Fire Service.

### What the Law Can do

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) lays out the regulations used by the fire service to determine the fire protection required for each premises. In cases where businesses or individuals are not compliant with legislation the Fire Service can use the RRO to issue 21 day repair notices, close businesses down, and even to prosecute offenders where necessary.

## RRO 2005 - Article 13 – Fire-fighting and fire detection

### The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

#### *Fire-fighting and fire detection*

**13.** —(1) *Where necessary (whether due to the features of the premises, the activity carried on there, any hazard present or any other relevant circumstances) in order to safeguard the safety of relevant persons, the responsible person must ensure that—*

*(a) the premises are, to the extent that it is appropriate, equipped with appropriate fire-fighting equipment and with fire detectors and alarms; and (b) any non-automatic fire-fighting equipment so provided is easily accessible, simple to use and indicated by signs.*

### How many extinguishers do I need?

There is a calculation that gives you an indication of the volume for 'Class A' fires, this is detailed as follows:

At least 2 extinguishers offering a combined rating of 26A on each floor. If the floor area exceeds 400 sqm cover should be determined by a calculation of  $0.065 \times \text{floor area in sqm}$ .

The fire extinguishers themselves give details of their individual 'A' rating, for example a 6 Litre water extinguisher could well be 13A.

In an office environment, for example, a water or foam extinguisher covering class A fires will often be situated next to a Co2 extinguisher which will cover the risks of the electrical appliances catching fire.

The general guidance is that you should not have to travel more than 30 metres in order to find the correct type of extinguisher required for the risk.






There are various other methods for calculating the ratings of class B and class C fires; however we would strongly recommend the services of a fire company to advise you on the volume and type of extinguishers you require.

### What types of extinguishers are there?

Listed below is a chart outlining the general types of extinguisher available and their use.

However, we do not recommend that you purchase your own extinguishers without the guidance of a professional; it is extremely easy to end up with the wrong type or size of extinguisher and all extinguishers require correct installation and an initial 'commissioning' service even when new.

Any person installing fire protection equipment of any sort must be 'competent', competency is judged by training, skills & knowledge. If you have not had the training, you should not be selecting or installing extinguishers as you will leave yourself open to personal prosecution for failing to comply with the RRO.

	Water	FOAM SPRAY	Co2	ABC POWDER	WET CHEMICAL
 <b>A</b> wood, paper and textiles	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
 <b>B</b> Flammable liquids	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
 <b>C</b> Gaseous Fires	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
 <b>F</b> cooking oils and deep fat fryers	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
 Electrical fires	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
				Limited use due to visibility and breathing difficulties	

## Travel distances

Fire extinguisher should be sited in such a way that it is not necessary to travel from the site of any fire to reach and extinguisher further than the following

- Class A - 30 metres
- Class B – 10 metres
- Class C – 30 metres
- Class D – case by case
- Class F – 10 metres
- Electrical – 10 metres

## Siting of extinguishers

Ultimately the responsibility for the correct volume of extinguishers, the type and their locations should all be detailed in the fire risk assessment. A person completing a fire risk assessment is now responsible for all the fire systems on site, fire companies are now only duty bound to follow the guidance on the risk assessment. They can give general advice but are no longer legally responsible.

Ideally extinguishers should be located in clearly visible, unobstructed locations (not inside rooms) and on escape routes or by escape doors.

For buildings with multiple similar floor levels they should ideally be situated in the same location on each floor.

Examples where they **should not** be fitted include:

- Where a potential fire might prevent access to them.
- Close to heating supplies
- In concealed positions and behind doors or in cupboards
- In rooms or corridors away from exit routes
- Where they may cause an obstruction on an exit route
- Or where they may be damaged e.g. trolleys, forklifts



Extinguishers should also be indicated by signs, and should be fitted to a wall with brackets or on a stand. Please note that stands should not be used in schools or children's nurseries due to them potentially being knocked onto children.

Extinguishers more than 4KG in weight (this is the extinguishers weight not the extinguishing material) should be fitted with no more than 1 metre from the floor to the grab handle. Extinguishers less than 4kg in weight should be fitted with no more than 1.5 metres from the floor to the grab handle.

The correct height installation protects the user from injury on accessing and moving the extinguisher and also reduces the impacts of an extinguisher being accidentally knocked from its bracket.

Extinguishers should be unobstructed at all times. If an extinguisher is not in a visible location signs should be used to identify their location.

Extinguishers can be affected by adverse weather conditions and should not be sited close to heat sources and if sited in cold areas ideally stored in a weather proof cabinet and if necessary anti freeze added to the extinguishing medium.

Buildings with multiple floors should have extinguishers sited in the same positions on the each floor to ensure consistency for staff.

### **Powder Extinguishers**

There has been a clear change in the siting and location of powder extinguishers due to the impacts caused by their use. Powder extinguisher can be extremely messy and in some cases cause more damage than they save, restrict visibility and can affect a persons health especially those with breathing issues such as asthma. For these reasons it is now not recommended to use powder extinguishers in confined spaces, ideally their most appropriate location of use is large open spaces such as warehouses etc.

### **Training**

It is now a legal responsibility to train onsite staff in the practical application of extinguishers, understanding the different types, how to use them safely and how to identify when it is not safe to use them.

### **How often do they need to be checked?**

All extinguishers should be checked by someone onsite monthly and the details of these checks recorded, preferably in a fire log book; this need only be a simple visual inspection; if you need advice on this please ask.

All new extinguishers must have a commission service to put them into service. You should not carry out this service unless you have been specifically trained.

Extinguishers should be serviced annually by a competent person. Most companies use fire protection companies to undertake this servicing.

### **How often should they be changed?**

A Carbon Dioxide extinguisher (Co2) should normally last 10 years from installation before being removed. Most companies will replace new for old for you, but sometimes it is safe to return the original to service after stringent testing. Generally by replacing new for old you obtain a 10 year warranty for the product.

All other extinguishers have to be discharged, tested and refilled DTR 5 years from installation, or replaced new for old. Discharge-test-refill is exactly what it says; extinguishers are let off to ensure the extinguisher is working and refilled. A lot of extinguisher servicing companies are offering a new for old system as this gives you a 5 year warranty with your new product.

## **Our policy is to get out as quickly as possible; why do we need extinguishers?**

The fire service has made this clear in a report published by the Chief Fire Officers in 2011. Extinguishers are provided for the safety of staff and the improvement of escape by staff and also to protect the premises. You must train a sufficient volume of staff in safe use and handling of extinguishers and in basic fire safety awareness. Failure to do this will leave you open to prosecution and could also invalidate your business insurance.

Ultimately most fires start small, by training staff, you are more likely to save staff and the building in the case of a fire.

## **Do we need them on company vehicles?**

Generally only vehicles carrying hazardous materials in the following guidelines.

Over 7.5 tonnes – a minimum of 12kg ABC Powder, a 2kg Powder in the cab and at least one extinguisher being 6kg in weight.

Over 3.5 tonnes – a minimum of 8kg ABC Powder, a 1kg Powder in the cab and at least one extinguisher being 6kg in weight.

Up to 3.5 tonnes – a minimum of 4kg ABC Powder, all being available in the cab.

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