

FACT SHEET

Fire Extinguishers - Types & Uses

Portable Fire Extinguishers can save lives and property by putting out or containing fires within the capability of the extinguisher. However, they must be of the correct type for the particular fire, and they must be used correctly.

Selection of Fire Extinguishers

There are a number of types of portable fire extinguishers available in Australia. Each type of extinguisher may be rated for one or more classes of fire. In some cases, particular extinguishers are not only considered ineffective against certain classes of fire, they can be dangerous if used in those circumstances. The classes of fire are:

- Class A Ordinary Combustibles
- Class B Flammable and combustible liquids
- Class C Flammable gases
- Class D Combustible metals
- Class E Electrically energised equipment
- Class F Cooking oils and fats

Portable fire extinguishers are distinguishable by their labels and their colouring. In 1999 the standard colours of some portable fire extinguishers were changed. It is therefore likely that you may encounter two of the same type of extinguisher with different colourings.

The most common types of extinguishers are:

Water - solid red

Suitable for Class A fires. Not considered effective for Class B and Class C fires, and dangerous if used for electrically energised equipment or cooking oils or fats.

Foam - red with blue band or label (previously solid blue)

Suitable for Class A and Class B fires, with limited effectiveness for Class F fires. Not considered effective for Class C fires, and dangerous if used for electrically energised equipment.

Powder - red with a white band or label

These extinguishers are rated as either ABE or BE. ABE rated extinguishers are considered suitable for Class A, Class B, Class C and Class E fires. They are not considered effective for Class F fires. BE rated extinguishers are considered suitable for Class B, Class C and Class E fires, and may be used with limited effectiveness on Class F fires. They are considered effective for Class A fires.

More information over page/...



Range of Fire Extinguishers - the colour of the extinguisher is an indicator of its contents.



CO₂ family of Fire Extinguishers

Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) - Red with a black band or label
Suitable for Class E fires. Has limited effectiveness on Class A, Class B and Class F fires.

Vapourising Liquid - Red with Yellow band or label
Suitable for Class A and Class E fires. Has limited effectiveness on Class B fires. Not considered effective for Class F fires.

Wet Chemical - Red with an Oatmeal band or label (previously oatmeal colour)

Suitable on Class F fires and may be used on Class A fires. Not considered effective for Class B or Class C fires and dangerous if used on Class E fires.

Class D fires require special purpose extinguishers.

The colours above only apply to extinguishers marketed in Australia. On aircraft, ships and some industrial sites in Australia, or when you are overseas you may find extinguishers with other colour schemes. Read the label carefully before use.



Banned Halon Extinguishers

Older types of extinguishers may still be encountered. These include reversible soda acid and foam type extinguishers together with halon 1211 (BCF) type. Halon 1211 has been found to be an ozone depleting substance. Unless special exemptions have been obtained, BCF extinguishers have been banned and should be returned to a fire protection supplier or the fire brigade as soon as possible.

Portable fire extinguishers come in a range of sizes and ratings, and the higher the rating, the larger the fire it can be used on. However, larger and heavier extinguishers (which generally have the higher ratings) can be more difficult to handle, especially for persons of a lighter build.

It is recommended that the extinguisher you buy is approved by Standards Australia.

For more information regarding classes of portable fire extinguishers you can purchase a FPA Australia Portable Fire Extinguisher Guide, visit www.fpaa.com.au/catalogue



Australian Standards approval as per AS1841.6

Also see:

Servicing Fire Extinguishers: A Guide for Consumers

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