



Loss Control Insight

Fire Extinguishers: Flight or Fight

In the event of a fire, we are all confronted with the decision of whether to fight the flames with an extinguisher or evacuate the building immediately. This is probably the most important decision you will face when a fire breaks out.



When you are not trained in portable extinguisher use, the answer is easy: You should evacuate. If you are trained with extinguishers, however, there are many things to consider when deciding whether to fight or take flight. But before you decide to fight a fire or flee a building, pull the fire alarm to notify others in the building of the emergency. Small fires can often be put out quickly by a well-trained employee with a portable fire extinguisher.

Fight If you decide to attempt to extinguish the fire, take the following actions:

- Position yourself between the fire and your escape route.
 - Get the fire extinguisher.
 - Back away from an extinguished fire in case it flames up again.
- Evacuate immediately if the extinguisher is empty and the fire is not out.
 - Evacuate immediately if the fire becomes bigger.

Remember the acronym PASS:

1. P—Pull the pin that unlocks the operating handle.
2. A—Aim the extinguisher low at the base of the fire.
3. S—Squeeze the lever on the extinguisher to discharge the agent.
4. S—Sweep the nozzle or hose from side to side and continue to sweep the extinguisher back and forth at the base of the flames until the fire is out or the extinguisher is empty.

Do not attempt to extinguish a fire involving flammable gas unless you're sure the source of gas can be shut off. In fact, if the only fuel burning is the leaking gas, the best method for extinguishing the fire is to shut off the fuel supply. Fighting such a fire without shutting off the fuel will allow unburned gas to escape into the air, which could lead to a dangerous buildup, and an explosion could occur.

Different types of fire extinguishers are designed to fight different types of fire. There are five basic classifications of fires and extinguishers. The extinguishers are labeled with either letter-shaped or pictorial symbols that indicate what types of fires they are intended for.

Multipurpose extinguishers with an ABC label are suitable for use with fires involving ordinary combustibles, flammable liquids, and energized electrical equipment. These extinguishers should include a symbol for each hazard type.

If you have the slightest doubt about your ability to fight a fire, evacuate immediately!