

# The Gowrie Safety Report

Safety & Loss Prevention Insights



## Portable Fire Extinguishers – Safety Report

Portable fire extinguishers can be found everywhere; in homes, in the workplace, on boats, in vehicles. But just having extinguishers around is not enough, especially in the workplace. When extinguishers are provided for use by employees, OSHA's standards for placement, use, maintenance, and testing must be complied with – both for safety and to avoid multiple \$7,000 fines. OSHA fines are per violation, and in this case, it means per fire extinguisher! OSHA's complete standards for Portable Fire Extinguishers are in regulation [29 CFR 1910.157](#).

**Placement** is all about ease of access. Blocking an extinguisher (like shown in the photo) is both unsafe and a sure way to a \$7,000 OSHA violation fine. Placement guidelines include:

- Must be signed and mounted to the wall at "grab" height
- Must be free and clear of any clutter
- Must not be blocked in any way (even from temporary items)
- Must have a minimum of 36" of clearance (painting a red or yellow area on floor helps remind employees)
- Must never be used as a hook for coats, sweatshirts, extension cords, or anything else



**Common Types:** Different extinguishers are designed to fight different types of fires. Most extinguishers are combination extinguishers, of the "ABC" type, which can be used to fight many common fires.

- A Type – For common combustibles; paper, wood and trash
- B Type – For flammable liquids, greases and gases
- C Type – For electrical fires
- D Type – For metals
- K or F Type – For kitchens or cooking oils

**Spacing:** The potential type of fire dictates the required spacing and distance from employees. For Class A or D fires, travel distance for employees to any extinguisher must be 75 feet or less. For Class B fires, travel distance must be 50 feet or less. For Class C fires, travel distance is based on appropriate pattern for the existing Class A or Class B hazards.

### Training – Employees need to know how to use them.

- If portable fire extinguishers are provided for employee use in the workplace, the employer must provide an employee educational program
- Training must be provided upon initial employment and at least annually thereafter

### Inspection and Maintenance – If extinguishers don't work they are useless.

- Extinguishers must be subjected to at least an annual maintenance check
- Extinguishers should be checked monthly; date and initial should be recorded on the back of the tag
- Employers must record the annual maintenance date and retain this record for one year
- Hydrostatic testing must be conducted in accordance with OSHA TABLE L-1, 1910.157(f)(3)
- Complete OSHA testing and maintenance schedules are detailed in [29 CFR 1910.157](#)

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