

## Fire Extinguishers

Version 1 May 2005

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 extinguishers 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)

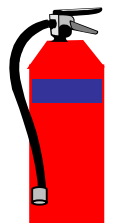
Suitable for Class A fires. Not considered effective for Class B and Class C fires, and dangerous if used for electrically energised equipment or cooking oils or fats.



#### Foam

(Old colour = solid Blue. New colour = Red with Blue band or label)

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



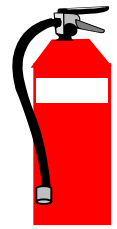
## Fire Extinguishers

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### Powder

(Red with a White band or label)

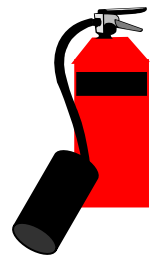
These extinguishers are rated as either ABE or BE. ABE rated extinguishers are considered suitable for Class A, Class B, Class C and Class E fires. They are not considered effective for Class F fires. BE rated extinguishers are considered suitable for Class B, Class C and Class E fires, and may be used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



### 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.



### Vaporising Liquid

(Red with a Yellow band or label)

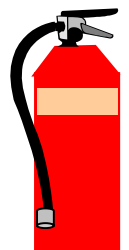
Suitable for Class A and Class E fires. Has limited effectiveness on Class B fires. Not considered effective for Class F fires.



### Wet Chemical

(Old colour = Oatmeal. New colour = Red with an Oatmeal band or label)

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 for 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.

## Fire Extinguishers

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Older types of extinguisher 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 type 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.

### Placement of extinguishers

Extinguishers should be placed near to where they may be used. However, they should not be so close that a fire will prevent you from reaching the extinguisher. Fire protection specialists and your fire brigade can offer advice on placement. In most buildings (other than family homes) it is a requirement that extinguishers be clearly visible with an approved indicator sign placed above.



### Maintenance

Extinguishers require regular maintenance. Check with your supplier for details. Rechargeable extinguishers must be recharged immediately after use.

### Further Information

*Australian Standard AS 2444 Portable Fire Extinguishers and Fire Blankets - Selection and Location* provides further authoritative advice.

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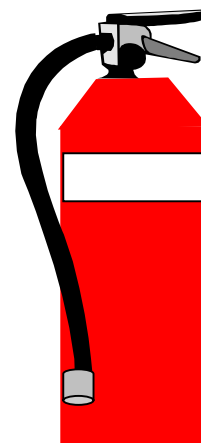
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### Fighting a Fire

Before you even consider fighting a fire, you must ensure that all persons in the area are alerted and have left, or are leaving the building, and that the fire brigade has been called.

The first question you must then ask yourself is whether or not you should fight a fire at all. In most cases, portable fire extinguishers offer only sufficient fire fighting agent to fight a relatively small fire. It may be more effective and safer for you to leave the fire to the fire brigade. If you leave a fire, close off the area as you go. If you do propose to fight a fire:

- Be certain that the fire is contained to a small area (such as a wastebasket) and is not spreading beyond the immediate area.
- Be sure that your back is to a safe and unobstructed exit, and the fire cannot spread to block your path.
- Be sure that the extinguisher you use is of the proper type and size.
- Prepare the extinguisher for use (this may involve pulling a pin, unlatching or pressing a button or lever).
- Aim the extinguisher or nozzle at the base of the fire.
- Squeeze the handle to release the extinguishing agent.
- Sweep the extinguisher from side to side across the base of the fire until it appears to be out.
- Watch the fire for a few moments to see it reignites. If re-ignition occurs, repeat the above process.



### Training

Many fire protection suppliers, fire brigades and specialist consultants offer training and practice in fire safety, first response and fighting fires with portable extinguishers.



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Disclaimer: Please note that the information provided here is basic fire safety information and that if you have questions or concerns, please contact FPA Australia, your local fire service or other professional body for clarification or additional information.