

Safety Note #50

PORTABLE FIRE EXTINGUISHER BASICS



Photograph Courtesy of South Coast REC

Information available from the U.S. Fire Administration indicates nationwide there are approximately 1.8 million fires annually that cause an average of 4,200 deaths and 24,900 injuries. More than 100 people die from fires in California each year. Becoming familiar with the use of a portable fire extinguisher may prevent or reduce fire-related death, injuries, and damage. California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 8, Section 6151 addresses portable fire extinguishers.

Four Types of Fires

1. **Class A.** Fires in ordinary combustible materials such as wood, cloth, paper, rubber, and many plastics.
2. **Class B.** Fires in flammable or combustible liquids, gases, greases, and some rubber and plastic materials.
3. **Class C.** Fires that involve energized electrical equipment where the electrical nonconductivity of the extinguishing media is important.
4. **Class D.** Fires in combustible metals such as magnesium, titanium, zirconium, and potassium.

Portable Fire Extinguisher Use and Requirements

- Portable fire extinguisher use is limited to those Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) employees that voluntarily agree to use them.
- ANR employees are not authorized to fight structure fires -- immediately call 911.
- Never use a portable fire extinguisher on a fire that is beyond its capacity (i.e., a structure fire).
- Always use the properly rated portable fire extinguisher for the type of fire. For example, an ABC rated portable fire extinguisher may be used on Class A, Class B, or Class C fires.
- The acronym "PASS" is used to remember the steps for deploying a portable fire extinguisher as follows:
 - P – Pull the pin.
 - A – Aim the extinguisher nozzle toward the base of the flames.
 - S – Squeeze the trigger while holding the extinguisher canister upright.
 - S – Sweep the extinguisher from side to side, causing the fire area to be covered.
- Always use a portable fire extinguisher while you are located between an escape route and the fire.
- Never attempt to use a portable fire extinguisher if the fire has spread beyond its starting point.
- Always leave the fire area whenever: 1. the escape route becomes threatened; 2. the portable fire extinguisher becomes depleted; or 3. the fire becomes uncontrollable.
- All portable fire extinguishers shall be inspected monthly and undergo an annual maintenance inspection.
- ANR employees that volunteer to use portable fire extinguishers shall receive annual portable fire extinguisher training.