

TOOLBOX TALK

Fire extinguishers toolbox talk

About six minutes · CDM 2015, regulation 32

SITE	DATE	GIVEN BY

WHY IT MATTERS

HSE estimates there are hundreds of fires on construction sites every year, putting workers and the public at risk. Sites are full of things that burn: timber, packaging, insulation, sheeting, adhesives, fuel and gas, with hot works, heaters and temporary electrics to light them.

A fire in a skip or a pile of packaging can be put out in seconds with the right extinguisher. The same fire, tackled with the wrong one, or left while people look for the right one, can take a building. And people die fighting fires they should have walked away from. This talk is about knowing which extinguisher, how to use it, and when not to.

HSE, Fire safety in construction (HSG168), third edition 2022

THE POINTS TO MAKE

- ☐ **Alarm first, always**

If you find a fire, raise the alarm before you do anything else, using the site alarm, the air horn or by shouting, so everyone else can get out. Then call 999 or make sure someone has. Only then, if the fire is small, you are trained and your escape route is behind you, use an extinguisher. Your life is worth more than the building.
- ☐ **The colour bands**

Every extinguisher has a red body with a coloured band or label near the top. Red for water, cream for foam, blue for dry powder, black for carbon dioxide and yellow for wet chemical. Learn them, because in a fire there is no time to read. Know which colours are at each fire point on this site, and what each one is for.
- ☐ **How to use one**

Stand a safe distance back with your exit behind you. Pull the pin, test with a short burst, then aim at the base of the fire, not the flames, and sweep from side to side. Keep low, out of the smoke. Hold a carbon dioxide extinguisher by the handle, not the horn, which gets cold enough to burn. When it is out, back away and watch for it starting again.
- ☐ **Keep the fire points ready**

Extinguishers live at the fire points the site has set, in clear view, with nothing stacked in front of them. Never move one for another job, never use one as a door stop, and report one that has been used, has lost its pin or seal, or has a needle out of the green. Extinguishers are checked regularly and serviced by a competent person.
- ☐ **Which extinguisher for which fire**

HSE’s guide for site is simple. Wood, paper, cloth and packaging: water. Flammable liquids such as petrol, diesel, paint and solvents: dry powder or foam. Electrical fires: carbon dioxide. Burning fat or cooking oil in the welfare kitchen: wet chemical or a fire blanket. Read the label on the extinguisher. It shows the fires it is for and the ones it is not.
- ☐ **Never on these fires**

Never use water or foam on electrical equipment that may still be live; water conducts. Never use water on burning fat or oil; it erupts. Never put out a gas fire unless the gas can be turned off first, because escaping gas can build up and explode. If you are not sure what is burning, or which extinguisher to use, get out and leave it.
- ☐ **When to walk away**

Leave the fire and get out if it is bigger than a waste bin, if it is spreading, if the smoke is building up, if your extinguisher has run out, or if your way out is being cut off. A small extinguisher empties in seconds. Close doors behind you if you can, go to the assembly point and tell the person in charge where the fire is.

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TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

Fire extinguishers toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Raise the alarm and call 999 before tackling any fire.
- Know where the fire points are and which extinguishers each one has.
- Check the label and use the right extinguisher for what is burning.
- Aim at the base of the fire and keep your escape route behind you.
- Keep fire points clear and report any used or damaged extinguisher.
- Get out if the fire grows, spreads, or the smoke builds up.

DO NOT

- Do not fight a fire unless you are trained and it is small.
- Do not use water or foam on electrics that may be live.
- Do not fight a gas fire unless the gas supply has been turned off.
- Do not hold a carbon dioxide extinguisher by its horn.
- Do not move extinguishers from the fire points or block them.
- Do not go back in for tools, phones or belongings.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Where are the fire points on this site, and what is at each one?
- ? Which extinguisher would you use on a burning skip, a burning generator and a diesel spill fire?
- ? Who here is nominated and trained to use fire fighting equipment?
- ? What does the fire alarm sound like on this site, and where is the assembly point?
- ? When were the extinguishers last checked, and who checks them?

TO CLOSE

An extinguisher in the right hands, on the right fire, in the first minute, can stop a small fire becoming a disaster. In the wrong hands, on the wrong fire, or too late, it puts someone in danger. So raise the alarm first. Know your colours and which fire each one is for. Use it only if the fire is small, you are trained and your way out is clear. And if in doubt, get out, close the door and leave it to the fire service.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Fire extinguishers toolbox talk: given and understood

Each person signs on the day to say they were present and understood the talk. Anyone who joins the team later is given the talk before starting, and signs here.

SITE	DATE	TIME	GIVEN BY
NAME	COMPANY	TRADE OR ROLE	SIGNATURE

QUESTIONS RAISED, AND THE ANSWERS GIVEN	ACTIONS AGREED, WHO AND BY WHEN	
TALK GIVEN BY (SIGNATURE)	POSITION	DATE

MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999, REGULATION 10: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

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