

## SAFETY FACTS: FIRE EXTINGUISHER MAINTENANCE

Fire extinguishers need to be maintained in top operating condition -- always ready for immediate use. A fire extinguisher that is inoperative may jeopardize the safety of the user, as well as result in a probable increase in property damage.

The following are suggestions for proper fire extinguisher maintenance:

- Visually check extinguisher monthly to verify proper placement, accessibility, charge (pressure) and general condition. A supervisor or employee usually can do this. Also, maintain a record of when the extinguisher was checked. This is usually in a form of a tag, which is dated, initialed, and attached to each extinguisher. Never test an extinguisher by operating the discharge valve, even for a moment. A small amount of agent will be expelled, and the valve may not properly reset resulting in further loss of pressure.
- All fire extinguishers should be serviced at least once a year. This should be a thorough examination of the unit according to specific instructions. It may involve recharging or special testing, and is best handled by a qualified servicing organization.
- Recharge extinguishers immediately after any use or when pressure loss is noted. Recharging should be done only with the extinguishing agent or material specified by the manufacturer. This should be done by a qualified servicing organization.
- Do not obstruct extinguisher from access or plain view, and install them in a manner that protects them from pedestrian and vehicle traffic.
- Identify extinguisher locations by signs and/or other means of identification, such as wall or floor markings.
- Mount extinguishers that weigh more than 40 pounds so the top is not more than 3 ½ feet above the floor. Extinguishers may be placed up to 5 feet high, if the weight of the unit is less than 40 pounds.

The use of extinguishers is extremely valuable and effective on small fires. However, to be effective, they must be properly maintained, readily accessible and quickly used by personnel trained in proper extinguisher use. Key employees on each shift should be thoroughly trained in proper extinguisher use. Remember, not everyone is capable of using or willing to use a fire extinguisher.

Most fire extinguishers operate by simply pulling a safety pin, squeezing the handle and aiming the discharge at the base of the flames. However, some fire extinguishers operate differently. Instructions for extinguisher operation are on the nameplate. Read and understand the instructions before a fire emergency occurs.