

SafetyToolboxTalks

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Portable Extinguisher Inspections

Quick Quiz - Where is the nearest fire extinguisher right now? Where is the closest portable fire extinguisher at your normal work area?

It's very important that we each are aware of portable fire extinguisher locations without having to look too hard for too long because in the panic of the moment if a fire was to suddenly occur, seconds count.

More importantly, when is the last time you actually looked at the portable fire extinguisher in your work area? Have you ever?

- Is it charged fully?
- Is it damaged?
- Is it the proper type for the hazards in your area?
- Is it hung properly?
- Is it blocked?
- Has it been hydrostatically tested in the past 5-12 years?

Recently at a facility an employee was killed when he used a portable fire extinguisher to put out a small fire. Corrosion on the bottom of the fire extinguisher was serious enough that the extinguisher case ruptured when it was activated, and parts struck the employee in the chest. A similar incident occurred in 1988.

This fire extinguisher had a rubber boot or cap to protect the bottom of the cylinder case. Moisture had seeped in between the rubber and outside cylinder wall and caused the cylinder to corrode inside the boot. Over time, this corrosion weakened the cylinder and it ruptured when the internal CO2 cylinder was activated. Other extinguishers of this type have been found to have the same type of corrosion underneath the rubber boot.

Indepth inspection and testing of these devices is critical. Especially if your fire extinguishers have rubber or plastic boots or caps and are located in potentially corrosive environments such as:

Extinguishers stored outside, unprotected from the weather

Extinguishers stored in wet or damp environments

Extinguishers stored near marine facilities or other waterfront buildings, especially those located near salt water

Many large facilities have a service come in to inspect their fire extinguishers either monthly or some other periodic schedule. However, what about the one in your work area? Are you sure it has been looked at recently? Are you sure it wasn't missed during the last formal inspection?

Take a moment today and take a look at any extinguisher in your area. Let us know if you see signs that it is damaged or uncharged so it can be taken out of service and a replacement installed.