Hello everyone! Happy spring! This week [2018-04-03], we wanted to talk about fire extinguisher usage and selection. Fire extinguishers are helpful for immediate use on small fires. It’s important to understand that with proper training and education, fire extinguishers can save lives and property. Below you will read about how to choose the proper fire extinguisher, how to use it, and how to keep it maintained. Remember always call 911 before you use a fire extinguisher. Most importantly, do not feel like you have to use an extinguisher. Fires can be scary, even for trained professionals, and we would rather you be safe, than get injured.

Our general recommendation is that you only use an extinguisher when the fire is small, and contained to the object where the fire started. So if a fire starts in a trashcan, but has spread to curtains, or a desk, an extinguisher is going to have limited ability to control the fire, and you are then in danger.

This said, how do you choose the extinguisher that is right for you? Here are some tips to help you decide on what you need, and how to use it.

**There are five primary types of fire extinguishers, each designed to put out different kinds of fires.**

**Class A:** For use with ordinary materials like cloth, wood and paper. Often found in homes and businesses

**Class B:** For use with combustible and flammable liquids like grease, gasoline, oil and oil-based paints. Often found in homes and businesses

**Class C:** For use with electrical equipment like appliances, tools, or other equipment that is plugged in. Often found in homes and businesses

**Class D:** For use with flammable metals. Often found in factories

**Class K:** For use with vegetable oils, animal oils and fats in cooking appliances. Often found in commercial kitchens (restaurants, cafeterias, catering businesses)

The kind of extinguisher you need in your home is an ABC type. These are sold at most hardware stores.

**When Should I Use A Fire Extinguisher? Ask yourself these questions:**

Have I alerted others in the building that there’s a fire?

Has someone called the fire department?

Am I physically able to use a fire extinguisher?

Is the fire small and contained in a single object (like a pan or a wastebasket)?

Am I safe from the fire’s toxic smoke?

Do I have a clear escape route?
Use a fire extinguisher when all of these questions are answered “yes.” If you’re unsure about whether or not it’s safe to use a fire extinguisher, and for all other situations, alert others, leave the building, and call 911 from a mobile or neighbor’s phone. It is not recommended that children use fire extinguishers.

When operating a fire extinguisher, remember the word PASS:

Pull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you and release the locking mechanism.

Aim low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.

Squeeze the lever slowly and evenly.

Sweep the nozzle from side-to-side.

The importance of fire extinguisher maintenance: Check fire extinguishers for the following:

Easy access in an emergency: be sure nothing is blocking or limiting your ability to reach it.

The recommended pressure level: many extinguishers have gauges that show when pressure is too high or too low.

Working parts: make sure the can, hoses and nozzles aren’t damaged, dented, or rusted.

Cleanliness: remove any dust, oil, or grease that might be on the outside of the extinguisher.

Guidelines and Maintenance: Extinguishers can be shaken monthly to reduce the risk of the powder inside from hardening, and should be serviced once a year in a commercial building.

If you have one at home, you can probably keep it for longer, just make sure you shake it periodically. If it has been a long time since a professional looked at the extinguisher, you are better off buying a new one, as most extinguishers sold for home use are not serviceable, and the cost of a new extinguisher is often cheaper than the service.

If you need to dispose of old extinguishers, discharge the extinguisher into a big trash can, keeping the lid as closed as you can with the hose inside the can. Once the extinguisher is empty, you can throw it out. *The agent is similar to baking soda, and while it will irritate your lungs, and make you cough, it is not dangerous. That said, you should avoid breathing it, because it is extremely irritating.*

As always, if you have any questions, please let us know!

Robert Marshall

Fire Marshal

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District