

The ABC's of Fire Extinguishers

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Jeff Dale from Toronto's Classic Fire Protection service came in to talk about fire extinguishers. Research has shown that one reason people do not have fire extinguishers, or that they don't put them out on the wall where they should be, is that they find that big red can ugly. So something interesting -- you can now buy them in white, silver, and gold as well as the standard red. Stay away from ones with a plastic head, as they can actually soften near a heat source and set themselves off without a fire. All domestic fire extinguishers will be some combination of the A - B - C characteristics of fire extinguishers. A = to fight fires on All combustible materials, like wood, paper or textiles. B = Baking, to fight grease, oil or gas fires. C = Current, to fight electrical fires. Nowadays all three symbols will be on all fire extinguishers and they will put a large red X over any application that will not work with this particular fire extinguisher. The most common fire extinguisher for residential use is one with all three marked on it -- an ABC extinguisher. But there is one important exception: The ABC extinguisher material is not toxic, but it does have some ammonia in it, which should never be combined with chlorine -- like around swimming pools -- as that will form a highly toxic gas. So around swimming pools and the shed that holds their chemicals, you need a BC extinguisher that has the A crossed out. Don't bother with the small extinguishers. They last for about 3 seconds. The big ones only last 8 seconds anyway, and since you don't have any practice in shooting these things off, you need that extra time to actually attack the fire. Hang an extinguisher near an exit so that when you go to pick it up you have the option of Fight or Flight. Always fight a fire with your back towards your escape route. The technique for using an extinguisher is called PASS - Pull the pin -- Aim the extinguisher -- Squeeze the handle -- Sweep back and fourth. And always spray at the base of the flame. Check the gauge on your extinguisher at least every six months to be sure it is in the green zone and get it serviced if it is too low, or too high. And every 6 years you must change the chemicals inside because eventually they end up caking to the bottom and won't work when needed. So always have the purchase or maintenance date on every extinguisher, or as I prefer, mark them with the date you need to change them, like the "best before" date at the grocery store.

Keywords:

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