

# risk alert



Listening. | Learning. | Leading.®

## Fire extinguishers are a hot topic

Members of a congregation are busy preparing the sanctuary for an evening worship service. One member has been assigned the duty of lighting candles in the sanctuary and soon completes that assignment, tossing the used matches in the trash. Not a minute later, there's a shout: "Fire!" Using her instincts, she hurries to the nearest fire extinguisher and manages to put out the small fire. All is well, and no one has been harmed.

But what if she hadn't known where the extinguisher was located or how to use it? Or what might have happened if the extinguisher failed to work because it wasn't charged?

Small fires can be contained and extinguished if the members of your congregation, especially volunteer leaders, are aware of the equipment and know how to use it. It is also imperative that the equipment is properly maintained.



## Know your equipment

A fire extinguisher is a basic tool for fighting small fires. However, one kind of fire extinguisher might not be right for putting out every type of fire. If the wrong extinguisher is used, the flames could actually spread and intensify the fire. To prevent this from happening, choose the type of fire extinguisher most suitable for your worship center's needs.

Most likely, a multipurpose fire extinguisher (ABC) will be sufficient for the protection of most of your facility. If you have a kitchen or cooking area, you also need to have a Type K extinguisher for defense against combustible cooking media fires. For more information on the different types of fires and extinguishers, visit [www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com) and click on "Safety Resources," then "Fire Prevention."

## Preventing a quick spread

The first step of your preparedness is learning where the extinguishers in your facility are located. There should be at least one extinguisher for every 2,500 square feet of the building and a minimum of one extinguisher on each level of the building. In case of a fire, a person should not have to travel more than 50 feet to reach an extinguisher. Your fire extinguishers

(Over)

should be conspicuously placed where they will be easy to locate and reach when needed. If you choose to store a fire extinguisher in a cabinet or closed area, mark the location so others know that the extinguisher is there.

If a fire occurs in your facility, combine these actions with your own good judgment to handle the situation safely. The moment you notice the fire, have someone alert everyone else in the building and call 911. While avoiding putting yourself or others at risk, begin to fight the small fire if:

- Your instincts tell you its okay.
- The fire is small (in its earliest stage) and contained, and you know what is burning.
- You are not in a confined space and have a means of escape at your back.

## Remember PASS

If these criteria are met, stand 8 to 10 feet away and fight the small fire using PASS:

**P**ull the pin.

**A**im the extinguisher nozzle or hose at the base of the fire.

**S**queeze the handle on the extinguisher.

**S**weep the nozzle or hose from side to side. As the fire diminishes, move closer and around the base until the flames are completely out. Watch the area for a few minutes afterward—in case of reignition.

## Regular maintenance goes a long way

Keeping your facility's fire extinguisher well maintained is just as important as knowing how to use it. A good maintenance schedule includes a quick checkup every 30 days in which you should ask yourself: Is the extinguisher in the correct location? Is it visible and accessible? Does the gauge or pressure indicator show the correct pressure? If you have a carbon dioxide extinguisher, have a professional weigh it for pressure accuracy during this part of your checkup. If your extinguisher needs to be refilled, contact a local fire equipment professional to service the fire extinguisher.

In addition to these checkups, your extinguisher needs to be serviced annually by a fire equipment professional. A tag showing the date of each inspection and the initials of the person who performed the inspection should be attached to all fire extinguishers.

**For a complete collection of the Risk Alert series, visit our Web site and look in the Safety Resources section.**