



Safety & Risk Office 5-Minute Safety Talk No. 7 – How to Use a Portable Fire Extinguisher

Note to Supervisor: This 5-Minute Safety Talk (in some places, it might be called a Toolbox Talk or a Tailgate Talk) is designed not only to communicate important safety information to your employees, but also to be given to them by you, which will hopefully reinforce the message and let them know your expectations for safety. You can use the text below as a script to be rendered verbatim or just as talking points to be stated in your own words. Please also complete the attendance listing on the last page and send it to Safety & Risk, Mail Stop 66.

What should you do if you see a fire? First, you need to alert others and evacuate the area as quickly as possible. Know the locations of the local fire alarm pull stations in your area so that you can go to the closest one possible. Always sound the alarm regardless of the size of the fire. Just because a fire is small does not mean that it will be easy to put out, and you need to sound the alarm so that others are evacuating the area no matter what happens. Know your evacuation routes and exits so that you can move quickly and escape safely. Exit the area as quickly as possible, leave the building and report to the designated Safe Assembly Area for the building. When you are at a safe location, call 911 and Security.

After the alarm has been sounded, and before you make any decision about whether you should try to put out any fire, you need to keep some rules for fighting fires in mind. The first rule of fire-fighting is that you must not take any unnecessary risks. You are not expected to be a firefighter. There are professional firefighters that the College can use instead. The last thing the College wants to have is a dead hero. Treat all fires as dangerous!

But there are other fire-fighting rules to also remember before you grab the fire extinguisher. First of all, you must know where they are located in your area and how to use one. If the area is smoky, do not try to locate an extinguisher—just get out! More people die from smoke inhalation than from the flames. Do not attempt to fight the fire unless all of the following conditions apply: the alarm has been sounded; the fire is small and confined and not spreading (i.e., it is an incipient fire in its beginning stages only); you have a route of egress (one that is to your rear and cleared, which you can reach without exposure to fire); the proper extinguisher for the type of fire is available; and you have been trained in how to use the extinguisher.

You should keep in mind that portable fire extinguishers, such as those found throughout the College, are small—otherwise they would not be portable. Being small, portable fire extinguishers will fully discharge in approximately 15 seconds. Accordingly, a portable fire can be used only on a small fire in its beginning stages in an attempt to put it out before it can spread. For any other fire, you must EVACUATE!

Do not attempt to fight the fire if any of following conditions exists: you do not know what is burning; the fire is in a lab with chemicals or biohazards; there is a potential for explosion; you do not have the proper fire extinguisher for the type of fire you are facing; you have no exit to your rear; the fire could block your means of escape; you might inhale smoke; the fire is too large to handle safely; or your instincts tell you not to try to fight the fire. If you have any doubts, you should evacuate immediately.

If you have evaluated the fire and know that all of the conditions specified above for safely fighting the fire are present, you may locate one of the College's fire extinguishers and proceed to use it. The College has dry chemical fire extinguishers are found in many locations, including the corridors of academic and office buildings; in or immediately outside all laboratories where chemicals are stored and used; in or immediately outside mechanical spaces where motorized or other equipment that might reasonably cause a fire is present; in garages and maintenance areas; in campus storage buildings; and mounted inside certain College vehicles. Most of the fire extinguishers at Palm Beach State College are ABC dry chemical fire extinguishers, which means they can be used on almost any fire that may occur. An ABC dry chemical fire extinguisher will have a label with a pictograph showing burning trash and wood (Class A fire), the gasoline can and burning flammable liquid (Class B fire) and the electrical cord and burning outlet (Class C fire), which indicates that it can be used on any of these types of fires.

It's easy to remember how to use a fire extinguisher if you remember the acronym "PASS": P for Pull; A for Aim; S for Squeeze; and S for Sweep.

P for Pull means to pull the pin on the handle and remove it. The pin keeps the handle immobile so that the extinguisher does not inadvertently discharge. In the course of pulling the pin, you will break the plastic tamper seal—that's OK because the seal is there only to indicate whether the extinguisher has been previously used. After pulling the pin, the top handle can be squeezed downward, which will allow you to discharge the contents of the extinguisher.

A for Aim means to aim the nozzle of the extinguisher at the base, or very bottom, of the flames. This is where the fuel feeding the fire is located, and you have to hit the fuel with the extinguishing agent in order to interrupt the chemical reaction that is occurring. If you aim at the flames, the extinguishing agent will fly right through, missing the fuel, and do no good.

S for Squeeze means to squeeze the top handle downward towards the bottom handle. This depresses a button that releases the extinguishing agent that is under pressure.

S for Sweep means to sweep the nozzle of the fire extinguisher from side to side, aiming at the base of the flames, until the fire is completely out. Start using the extinguisher from a safe distance away, then slowly move forward. Once the fire is

out, keep an eye on the area in case it re-ignites. In other words, back away from the fire. Never turn your back on a fire unless you are certain that it is out.

Although you may have used the fire extinguisher correctly, there may come a point at which you will have to give up on putting out the fire and evacuate. This point occurs when the fire extinguisher is empty, but the fire is still burning. Or, the fire starts to get larger. Or, the fire becomes smoky. If any of these occurs, the fire is too dangerous for you to continue to fight it, and you must evacuate the area IMMEDIATELY!

Any time that a fire extinguisher is used, even if for only a few seconds, it must be reported to Facilities as soon as possible. You must do that so that Facilities can inspect the extinguisher and have it refilled to make it ready for the next time a fire emergency may occur.

In summary, here are some points to remember about when and how to use a fire extinguisher. Make the right decision and use a fire extinguisher only if: 1. You have sounded the alarm. 2. You are trained in how to use a fire extinguisher. 3. You know what is burning. 4. The fire is small and contained. 5. Smoke and heat have not filled the area. And 6. You have a clear path of escape. To use a fire extinguisher, remember the acronym PASS. P for Pull the pin; A for Aim the nozzle at the base of the flames; S for Squeeze the handles together; and S for Sweep the nozzle from side to side. Follow your instincts. If you have the slightest doubt about your ability to fight the fire or sense that it is getting worse, you must evacuate immediately.

**5-Minute Safety Talk
No. 7 – How to Use a Portable Fire Extinguisher
Attendance List**

Presenter: _____ Date/Time: _____/_____/_____

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Send to the Safety & Risk Office, Mail Stop # 66, when completed.