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KEY ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE FIRE SAFETY PROGRAM

Fire extinguisher and fire safety training are crucial components of a comprehensive safety program. A fire extinguisher training program should be tailored to the specific workplace and adjusted for different groups of personnel, depending on the threats they face. The following key elements of a fire safety program should be covered in training sessions that include hands-on instruction.

1 **The combination of three sources leads to combustion; i.e., fire.** The three sources are fuel, oxygen and ignition. Fire extinguishers work by removing one or more of these sources, thereby stopping the chemical reaction that is combustion.

2 **Different types/classes of fires require different extinguishers,** because many fire extinguishers are designed for use on specific types of fires. Using a fire extinguisher that does not match the class of fire at hand



can actually increase the fire hazard, endangering both the user and those in the vicinity. Since most fires in an office workplace are electrical or chemical, providing appropriately sized ABC extinguishers, and training in their use, is essential.

3 **Assess and measure fire risks.** Because portable fire extinguishers are designed for early stages of firefighting, employees should know how to evaluate a fire situation.

- a. How big is the fire?
- b. Where is it located?
- c. Is the amount of heat prohibiting the extinguisher user from getting close enough to be effective?
- d. Is there a possibility of being overcome by smoke or fumes?
- e. Is there a way out if the fire cannot be extinguished?

4 **Know the emergency response procedures for your organization and exactly how the use of fire extinguishers fit into it.** Sounding an alarm should be the first step after a fire has been discovered. Ensure that employees know where the fire alarm activators are and how to use them. In most systems this will notify the alarm company who will then call the fire department. Shouting “fire” to warn others may be necessary and of course, call 911.

5

Using the fire extinguishers. Nothing compares to actual practice. Hands-on training is by far the most successful way to familiarize someone with extinguisher usage. Watching a video or providing a classroom demonstration is no substitute for seeing a fire, reaching for an extinguisher, pulling the pin and squeezing the trigger yourself. Most employees who have never used an extinguisher are amazed at how little discharge time it has. A standard 10-pound ABC extinguisher provides just 20 seconds of discharge. Training not only builds confidence, it also breaks down overconfidence. Hands-on training helps employees more accurately assess risk and appreciate the limits of portable extinguishers.

6

Employee safety first. If employees are unsure about a fire situation or have not had any training, then immediate evacuation is step one.

*Sources: National Safety Council
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