



Fire Extinguishers – Facts and Safety Issues

We are all so familiar with fire extinguishers hanging on walls that we don't even notice them. The sad truth is that most of us know nothing and care less than that, about them. But the humble fire extinguisher could save your premises and even lives and it behoves us all to raise our consciousness about them and understand how they work and what can go wrong. This leaflet is intended only to provide a glimpse of what you may not be aware of and hence to give the motivation to find out more.

All fire extinguishers are not created equal. There are well built, robust extinguishers, which can be serviced and refilled many times, and will give good service over many years, unless they are placed in a particularly corrosive environment such as in salty air or water conditions without protection, and as long as they are taken care of and servicing routines adhered to.

There are also much more cheaply-built fire extinguishers, which have a much thinner metal can, and less good quality paint and parts. These will rust, break, fail and dent much more readily and their life expectancy is far less. Additionally, many of the fire extinguishers available off the shelf in local shops, or off the internet only have a “built-in” life of five years. They will come with a guarantee of five years, but at five years, all fire extinguishers require a discharge / recharge test. Many cheap fire extinguishers are not capable of being disassembled to carry out this test. Thus, they have to be discarded and replaced with new units after five years.

At Fal Fire we supply and install only high quality units. This does inevitably make them more expensive but over their lifetime, they are cost-effective to buy.

Installing Fire Extinguishers You should be aware that you cannot simply buy a fire extinguisher off the internet and hang it on the wall in your business premises. The BS requires it to be commissioned on site by a qualified technician. And to comply with the law, it requires a current service label, carried out by a qualified technician. When we sell you a fire extinguisher, the commissioning is part of the overall cost, reflecting our overhead and training costs to be in business. Even if you have bought the extinguisher very cheaply elsewhere, we will make a service charge to come and commission it, as will anyone else.

Maintaining Fire Extinguishers Under the relevant British Standard, all fire extinguishers require an annual inspection by a qualified technician and an extended discharge recharge test every five years. These tests are recorded on the labels and represent a history of the unit. The label is a legal document and **should not be covered over** if you change service providers

Using Fire Extinguishers You should ensure you and your staff are trained and competent to select and use a fire extinguisher. We offer three training packages to suit your needs. These start from a straightforward one to two hour fire awareness training session, or you can choose that package, but with the add-on of fire extinguisher training with live fires, if you intend your staff to tackle fires or they are more than usually likely to encounter minor fires, such as in a kitchen. We also offer full Fire Marshall and Warden training, which is a one day course.

There are several different types of fire extinguisher and you should understand the appropriate choice to make for the type of fire you intend to use it on; also there are safety issues relating to their use. On Carbon dioxide-type extinguishers you must not use it if the horn is loose, as the horn safely disperses the force of the expanding gas. Whilst using a carbon dioxide extinguisher, be aware there will be some backward force and DO NOT TOUCH or grip the horn – as its temperature drops well below freezing and it will damage your skin. Dry powder extinguishers can obscure vision and be a safety issue if escape from the building becomes necessary. So be aware of your escape route before discharging one.

Abusing Fire Extinguishers Fire extinguishers are heavy objects which can be used as weapons. They can also be used to damage property, either by virtue of their weight, or of their contents. If you are placing fire extinguishers into a building, you should carry out a risk assessment of how likely they are to be tampered with and take the necessary steps to minimise the likelihood of this to avoid injury and also potentially, to avoid an insurance claim against yourself. Clearly an empty fire extinguisher is worse than useless.

There are various devices and options to make tampering with fire extinguishers less likely and you should discuss this with your service provider.