

Fire Prevention Awareness

Fire Extinguishers

When used properly, fire extinguishers can be an important part of stopping a fire before it grows and gets out of control. On campus, you'll be able to find a fire extinguisher just about anywhere you go. Whether or not you choose to use an extinguisher can be determined by a number of factors:

✓ Do you feel comfortable using an extinguisher?

- This takes into account whether you've been trained to use an extinguisher, your experience, and your overall willingness to engage a fire with an extinguisher. Your comfort level will likely vary depending upon the situation. **If you don't feel comfortable trying to use an extinguisher, you should evacuate.**

✓ Is the fire small enough to be extinguished?

- Most fire extinguishers only last about 10-18 seconds, so if the fire is too large or too spread out then the extinguisher will probably run out before you're able to get the fire under control. In general, you'll only want to use an extinguisher for a fire that is in a small, confined area.

✓ Is your escape route behind you?

- So you're comfortable enough to give it a try and the fire is at a manageable size. But let's say that confidence is misguided – if the fire doesn't go out and only gets larger, will you be able to get away safely? **If the fire you're trying to put out is between you and your only exit, you should evacuate.**

✓ Do you have the right type of extinguisher?

- Different types of fires require different types of extinguishers; using the wrong type of extinguisher on a fire is not only largely ineffective, but can actually make the fire worse. On campus, most of the guesswork has been taken out of this one, as the university assesses the potential fire types and distributes the appropriate type of extinguisher for most locations around campus.

These are the primary factors you should consider before using an extinguisher. At Messiah University, we monitor and maintain approximately 930 extinguishers across campus (including inspecting each extinguisher at the beginning of each month). It is still important to be aware of extinguisher locations and how an extinguisher operates *before* you have a fire situation. Wherever you happen to be, it is important to know if/where an extinguisher is available, as well as if it has been maintained and if it is appropriate for the potential fire hazards in your area. You'll also want to make sure the extinguisher is easily accessible, as you won't have time to search for it or dig it out of a closet in the event of a fire. For more fire extinguisher information, [check out this page from the U.S. Fire Administration](#).

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So you've reached the point where you decide to use your nearby fire extinguisher...but how do you do that?

Take a look at this [quick video tutorial from the Fire Equipment Manufacturers' Association](#) on the P.A.S.S. method for using fire extinguishers.

The P.A.S.S. method is as follows:

P – Pull the pin that prevents the extinguisher from accidentally discharging.

A – Aim the nozzle of the extinguisher at the base of the flames from approximately 8-10 feet away. The elements and chemical reaction that fuel a fire are all at the base of the flames; if the material from the extinguisher isn't aimed where the action is, or if you're too close or too far away, the extinguisher won't be effective.

S – Squeeze the handle/levers to discharge the extinguisher. If you forgot to pull the pin, this step will be extremely difficult!

S – Sweep the nozzle from side to side so that the material from the extinguisher is distributed across the entire base of the fire. In order to be fully effective, the entire base/origin of the fire must be covered or the fire may flare back up.

