

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – PORTABLE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Maybe the most ubiquitous of safety tools found throughout our membership is the portable fire extinguisher. Cal/OSHA, not surprisingly, has applicable regulations for the placement, use, maintenance and testing of the extinguishers. There are different standards depending on whether all employees are authorized to use them, or whether the employer's Fire Protection Plan designates limited use.

For our purposes we will concentrate on only a few elements that are commonly checked in facility inspections:

- Location: are the extinguishers accessible, and not blocked by other things?
- Inspection: is there a written record attached to the extinguisher showing that there has been a monthly visual inspection?
- Maintenance: is there a written record that an annual inspection of the extinguisher took place?
- Training: has there been annual training of all employees on how to use the extinguisher?

If you have fire extinguishers in your area of responsibility, or in the vehicles/equipment that you are responsible for, then you should probably be prepared to produce documentation that you have complied with these requirements. The extinguishers are relatively simple and effective to use (notwithstanding the YCPARMIA employee who filled her shoes with chemicals when she forgot to detach the hose). A single opportunity to put out a pan fire in training will probably make a lasting impression, and increase awareness of the importance of the fire extinguishers in the workplace.

But maybe the more important training involves making a decision on what to do when a fire is discovered. The first step is to always to sound the alarm – alert staff and get the fire department alerted. Then an informed decision on whether to use the fire extinguisher or evacuate can be made. Lastly, recognize that this is probably part of your Emergency Action Plan. Training is, as in all safety matters, the key.

Next Topic: Safety – Tying it all together