



U.S. Coast Guard

Marine Safety Office, Portland, Maine



FACT-SHEET

Inspection of Portable Fire Extinguishers

Most Commercial Fishermen in Maine and New Hampshire use a disposable type stored pressure Dry Chemical extinguisher to meet the legal requirements for fire protection equipment aboard their vessels. In order to fall into the “portable category” an extinguisher cannot weigh more than 55 pounds. Most models have a disposable factory sealed cylinder containing extinguishing agent and propellant gas, which is threaded into the valve so that the entire device is discarded after use. Once this type of extinguisher is used, it should be replaced, even if only a small amount of agent has been discharged, because the propellant gas will leak, leaving an unusable extinguisher.

A Certified fire extinguishing servicing agency or company is the most reliable way to ensure extinguishers are properly inspected and adequately maintained. Not all states require that these servicing agencies be trained or certified by NFPA prior to providing their services. This can create questions about the adequacy of the service or maintenance performed by these non-certified companies. Some fishing companies or organizations have elected to perform the required inspections and maintenance themselves and provide this service in-house by having an employee trained. Where states have no requirements, it is also possible for an individual to perform his own inspection and maintenance, especially for the disposable type stored pressure Dry Chemical extinguishers.

Buying the right portable fire extinguisher is the easy step. Check the extinguisher’s label to be sure it is listed by a recognized testing laboratory like, Underwriters Laboratory (UL) and it states that it is a “Marine Type U.S.C.G. Type (A,B,C,D), Size (I,II,III),” with “United States Coast Guard Approval Number 162.028...”. All approved marine type portable fire extinguishers are required to have a mounting bracket that is specifically designed for that extinguisher. In order for a portable fire extinguisher to remain “Coast Guard Approved” it must be mounted in its appropriate, “undamaged” bracket and must be properly serviced.

Properly serviced means that the fire extinguisher is being adequately maintained, which requires both periodic **inspection** and **maintenance**. An **inspection** is a quick check that visually determines that the fire extinguisher is properly placed and will operate. An inspection gives reasonable assurance that the extinguisher is fully charged and will function effectively if needed. An inspection should determine that the extinguisher:

- Is in its designated place (not laying against the side of the vessel wedged in a corner)
- Is conspicuous (not behind a door that is normally left open or being used as a hook for rain gear)
- Isn’t blocked in any way (you need to move three large fish boxes to get to it)

- Hasn’t been activated and partially or completely emptied
- Hasn’t been tampered with (cigarettes or other foreign objects placed in the nozzle)
- Hasn’t sustained any obvious physical or environmental damage (broken gage, corroded cylinder)
- With a pressure gage, shows a proper charge
- Has been properly maintained by checking the maintenance tag

To be effective, inspections must be frequent, regular and thorough. For a vessel going on a day trip, the inspections should be conducted prior to getting underway. For larger vessels that get underway for several days, less frequent inspections may be adequate depending on:

- The nature of the hazards present
- The exposure of the extinguisher to tampering, vandalism, and malicious mischief
- Exposure to the environment
- Likelihood of accidental damage
- The possibility of visual or physical obstructions to its accessibility

Maintenance means a complete and thorough examination, which should be done at least monthly. A maintenance check involves all the items listed for inspection and weighing of the extinguisher. Check the label on the portable fire extinguisher; it will list both the minimum and maximum Gross Weights. Weigh the extinguisher to be sure it falls between these values. If the extinguisher has a removable discharge hose, unscrew it so that the valve outlet and hose can be checked for obstruction. Before replacing the extinguisher in its bracket, turn it upside down and shake it to ensure the dry chemical extinguishing agent hasn’t caked at the bottom of the extinguisher. If the agent doesn’t feel like it is free flowing, it may not discharge when needed. The date of the monthly maintenance check should be recorded on a tag or label affixed to the extinguisher. Keeping the service record up to date will ensure you have the required number of “approved” extinguisher aboard and prevent your voyage from being terminated because of inadequate Fire Extinguishers.

The Size of the extinguisher is something else to think about, but that is the subject of another Fact Sheet. References: 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 25.30; 46 CFR 28.160; 46 CFR 162.028, National Fire Protection Assoc. (NFPA) Standard 10.

For more information please contact:

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