

Fire Extinguishers: Know When to Evacuate

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

An extinguisher on the wall does not tell us who may use it or whether it suits the hazard. The first question is what the site's fire plan requires us to do. Nobody should discover their role during a fire.

Objective: Explain your fire-response role and identify the checks needed before relying on an extinguisher.

Key hazards or failure points

Delayed evacuation; unsuitable or inaccessible extinguishers; missing inspection or maintenance; fire, heat or smoke cutting off escape.

Practical controls

- Know how to raise the alarm, summon emergency help and evacuate. Follow the site plan. If your role is evacuation, leave and report to the assigned assembly point.
- Only attempt extinguisher use when the plan permits you, you have the required training, the extinguisher suits the fire and you have a clear escape path. If any condition is uncertain, evacuate.
- Keep designated extinguishers accessible. Report damage, discharge, missing units or overdue checks. Arrange required replacement protection through the responsible person.

Verify It in the Field

Before work, the responsible person compares each relevant unit's label and location with the fire hazards and applicable plan. Confirm its inspection and maintenance status; a tag alone does not establish current condition.

Visually check the unit using its instructions: required pin/seal, hose or nozzle, damage and charge indication where fitted. Some types have no pressure gauge. Do not discharge a unit to test it.

Walk the access and escape route before an emergency. Ask a crew member to explain their assigned role. Record the unit/location, check source, result, checker and time; send technical defects to authorized service personnel.

Stop and reassess

Hold work that depends on missing or unverified fire protection. In a fire, evacuate if you are unsure, the fire spreads, smoke or heat threatens you, escape is compromised or the extinguisher is ineffective. Do not delay leaving to find another unit. Re-entry needs the designated authority's clearance.

Ask the crew

1. What is your assigned action if you discover a fire here?
2. What evidence shows the nearby extinguisher is suitable and ready?
3. What condition would make you leave immediately?

Before exposure: confirm the role, the escape route and the required protection.

Sources: OSHA 1910.157; 1926.150; OSHA fire-extinguisher use guidance.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.