

Using a fire extinguisher

Easy · 10 min to learn, seconds to use · \$\$ for a home extinguisher

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A multipurpose (A-B-C) extinguisher with a testing-lab label
- ☐ A spot for it near an exit, not behind the stove
- ☐ A pan lid or baking sheet by the stove
- ☐ Your home fire escape plan and working smoke alarms

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 Buy the right one.** For a home, get a multipurpose extinguisher, labeled "A-B-C," that's big enough for a small fire but not too heavy for you to handle, and that carries an independent testing lab's label. USFA says to look for "UL Listed" or "ULC Listed".
- 2 Put it near an exit, and read its instructions now, before there's a fire.** Local fire departments often offer hands-on training.
- 3 When there's a fire, run the checklist.** Have I alerted others? Has someone called 911? Am I physically able? Is the fire small and contained to one object, like a pan or wastebasket? Am I safe from the smoke? Do I have a clear way out? Use the extinguisher only if every answer is yes.
- 4 Stand with your back to a clear exit, so the fire, heat and smoke can never get between you and the way out.**
- 5 Pull the pin.** Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you and release the lock. Pulling it also breaks the tamper seal.
- 6 Aim low, at the base of the fire, not the flames.**
- 7 Squeeze the lever slowly and evenly, and sweep the nozzle from side to side until the fire appears to be out.**
- 8 Back away and watch it.** If it flares up again, repeat. If the extinguisher runs empty and the fire isn't out, or the fire grows, get out right away.

Watch out An extinguisher holds only a little agent, and it can empty in a matter of seconds. Fires can grow and block your exit in seconds too, so try only very small, early fires. If you're unsure, alert others, leave and call 911 from outside.

DAD NOTE *The extinguisher is for buying time to get out, not for being a hero.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/tools/hand-tools-and-quick-fixes/using-a-fire-extinguisher/

Checked October 3, 2026. Sources: U.S. Fire Administration (FEMA); National Fire Protection Association; Occupational Safety and Health Administration.