

Safety Zone: Using Portable Fire Extinguishers in Healthcare Facilities

As the goal of healthcare facilities is to promote health and well-being, it's vital that healthcare providers ensure the safety and security of the building for both their patients and the employees.

Healthcare facilities are usually public buildings containing offices, restrooms, waiting rooms, dining rooms, patient rooms, and other common spaces. These types of public facilities have portable fire extinguisher requirements governed largely by NFPA 10 Standard for Portable Fire Extinguishers.

Updates to Portable Fire Extinguisher Standards for Healthcare Facilities

Some special and unique features within healthcare facilities necessitate specific requirements for portable fire extinguishers. In 2017, updates were made to the NFPA's 99 Healthcare Facilities Code 2018 and NFPA 101 Life Safety Code 2018, which affected how these facilities utilize portable fire extinguishers on site.

The 2018 updates to NFPA 99 lists specific requirements regarding the types of fire extinguishers used in particular areas within healthcare facilities. Updates to NFPA 101 affects wall-mounted fire extinguishers, ensuring they comply with accessibility standards under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Some of the specific portable fire extinguisher standards in healthcare facilities include:

- The use of non-ferrous/non-magnetic fire extinguishers in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment and associated rooms. The extremely powerful magnets used in MRI equipment can make a deadly flying missile or even very large, heavy objects attracted to magnets (like a steel-body fire extinguisher), so only non-magnetic objects are permitted in the vicinity of MRI suites.
- Class K portable fire extinguishers must be provided in areas where there is potential for a fire involving combustible cooking media, such as vegetable oils, animal oils or fats. Automatic fire suppression systems are necessary to protect commercial institutional cooking appliances in addition to a K extinguisher. These systems should be activated before trying to fight a cooking fire with an extinguisher.
- Class K extinguishers are not required where only residential equipment is used, cooking is limited, or deep fat frying is not allowed. However, new package automatic systems are increasingly available – and affordable – to protect residential-style cooking and appliances.
- Telecommunications entrance facilities and equipment rooms for electronic health records must be provided with clean agent portable fire extinguishers. Clean agent is defined as an “electrically nonconductive, volatile, or gaseous fire extinguishant that does not leave a residue upon evaporation.” Dry-chemical and water-mist fire extinguishers can damage sensitive electronic equipment in these areas. Additionally, operating rooms must be provided with water-mist or clean agent portable fire extinguishers.

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- Wall-mounted portable fire extinguishers must now not protrude from the wall surface on which they are mounted more than four and a half inches if the extinguisher is below 38 inches from the floor. If the extinguisher is above 38 inches from the floor, it should protrude no more than four inches from the wall. This applies whether the fire extinguisher is mounted directly to the wall or is in a cabinet. Many facilities need to install recessed cabinets in the wall to meet this new (2017) requirement of NFPA 99. At least one fire extinguisher manufacturer is now making “flattened” profile extinguishers specifically to meet this requirement.

In all cases, employees who are authorized or expected to use extinguishers should be trained on how and when to use portable fire extinguishers, with periodic refresher training. Personnel in the facility should be familiar enough with the extinguishers to ensure annual inspections are maintained with extinguishers being fully charged, and know how to remove them from their mountings, remove the safety pins and actuate the extinguishers.

Properly Using Portable Fire Extinguishers in Healthcare Facilities

Our infographic shares some helpful tips on the proper use of portable fire extinguishers in healthcare facilities and other public buildings.



Best Practice

Provide clean agent or water-mist types of extinguishers in operating areas, telecommunications rooms or where sensitive, susceptible equipment or electronics are located.

For additional information and resources on this topic and other safety and risk management subjects, visit the AmTrust Loss Control website:

www.amtrustfinancial.com/loss-control