

Fighting Fire and Preserving Progress:

The Unsung Role of Portable Fire Extinguishers in Environmental and Life Safety



Retired Chief Greg Rogers,
Fire and Life Safety Section Chair

Those towering city skyscrapers that form concrete jungles symbolizing human achievement and progress are awe-inspiring yet hardly invulnerable. They are susceptible to a destructive force that threatens both life and the environment: fire.

While we can marvel at the breadth and height of the massive structures,

it is important to recognize that it is the small portable fire extinguishers, mostly required by building codes, that play a crucial role in providing life-saving benefits while also mitigating the environmental impact of building fires in our communities.

In the midst of proposals to weaken building codes and remove fire safety features, the importance of fire safety standards cannot be



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overstated, including the common and yet affordable fire safety features such as the mandate for portable fire extinguishers. When it comes to safeguarding lives, property, and the environment, the layers of protection provided by code requirements are nothing short of invaluable. Sprinklers, fire doors, suppression systems, and training are all part of worthwhile and layered fire prevention.

Yet, it is the portable fire extinguishers that are often the unknown and unreported unsung heroes of firefighting, capable of containing or even extinguishing small incipient fires before they escalate into infernos. The full implications of these small, often overlooked devices extend far beyond immediate human safety.

We must consider the environmental impact of building fires. Beyond the obvious release of toxic smoke and gases, the incineration of building materials can result in the emission of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. These pollutants not only compromise air quality but also

contribute to the greenhouse gases responsible for climate change.

Moreover, the runoff from firefighting efforts, laden with chemicals, can contaminate water sources, posing risks to aquatic ecosystems and human health. A plastic product manufacturing firm, for example, might not use any hazardous materials, but a catastrophic fire can create toxic combustion byproducts. A routine office building fire can severely impact the environment from the fast burning of interior furnishings, carpets, curtains, rugs, plastics, electronics, maintenance equipment, and so on.

Thus, stopping a flickering flame before it becomes a blazing inferno is paramount. This is where portable fire extinguishers come into play as simple-to-use fire safety devices that are affordable and yet also eco-friendly. By enabling swift action at the initial stages of a fire, these eco-friendly warriors can aid in reducing the amount of building material consumed by flames and pollutants released.

Less severe fires mean less toxic smoke and fewer harmful gases released into the environment. The

ability to minimize the scope of fires also lessens the burden on firefighting efforts, reducing water usage and the subsequent chemical runoff that can harm our natural resources.

The use of portable fire extinguishers can often prevent the need for more extensive fire suppression methods, such as deploying large amounts of water or foam. These methods, while effective, come with their own environmental consequences. Water damage to buildings and infrastructure can lead to significant resource waste.

In essence, the use of portable fire extinguishers is a win-win situation for both life safety and environmental preservation. These devices provide an opportunity to prevent the escalation of fires, minimizing the environmental footprint left behind by such incidents. By adhering to and advocating for layered code requirements, we contribute to not only the safety and well-being of our communities but also the sustainability of our environment.

It is imperative that we foster a culture of fire prevention that recognizes the layered benefits fire extinguishers offer. They are not just tools for crisis management; they are tools for responsible environmental stewardship. It's time we appreciate their role in not only saving lives but also safeguarding the delicate balance of our ecosystems and reducing the ecological toll of building fires. 🔥

Chief Greg Rogers currently serves as the Chair of the IAFC's Fire and Life Safety Section and has a bachelor of science in engineering technology with an emphasis on fire protection and safety and a master's degree in leadership and management from Western Governors University. He started his career at the Oklahoma State Fire Service Training Center, then worked at North Metro Fire Rescue in Broomfield, CO, and then at South Kitsap Fire and Rescue and as Deputy Chief with Spokane Valley Fire Department.