# Using a Fire Extinguisher

Before using a fire extinguisher, read the instructions. Although there are many different [types of fire extinguishers](http://www.fire-extinguisher101.com/index.html), most of them operate in a similar manner.

A typical fire extinguisher contains 10 seconds of extinguishing powder. This could be less if it has already been partially discharged. Always read the instructions that come with the fire extinguisher and familiarize yourself with its parts. Fire prevention experts recommend that you get hands-on training before operating a fire extinguisher. Most local fire departments offer this service.

Only operate a fire extinguisher if you are trained to do so, you feel comfortable and the fire is small — no larger than a small garbage can. If possible, try extinguishing the fire in pairs, with one person operating a fire extinguisher at a time. Once the fire is out, don’t walk away or turn your back on it. Watch the area for a few minutes in case the fire reignites. Take the used extinguisher and tag it “out of service” immediately so it can be recharged. Place fully charged extinguishers back where any used extinguishers were.

Use this acronym as a quick reference. It is a good idea to print this reference and pin it next to your fire extinguisher.

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**Pull** the pin at the top of the extinguisher. The pin releases a locking mechanism and will allow you to discharge the extinguisher.**Aim** at the base of the fire, not the flames. This is important — to put out the fire, you must extinguish the fuel.**Squeeze** the lever slowly. This will release the extinguishing agent. If the handle is released, the discharge will stop.**Sweep** from side to side**.** Move the fire extinguisher back and forth until the fire is out. Operate the extinguisher from a safe distance, several feet away, and then move toward the fire once it starts to diminish. Read the instructions for your fire extinguisher. Different fire extinguishers need to be operated from different distances. **Remember:** Aim at the base of the fire, not at the flames. |