

Fire extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are a means of defence against fires in premises. Used correctly, a well-maintained, fully operational fire extinguisher can put out small fires and prevent them escalating. If you are in any doubt about using an extinguisher do not tackle the fire, no matter how small it is. Always put your and other people's safety first. Call out the fire and rescue service and get everyone out of the premises.

What type of fire extinguisher should I buy?

There are several types of fire extinguisher for domestic use.

Whatever type of fire extinguisher you decide upon, ensure it carries either British or European standards and is fitted and used according to the manufacturer's directions.

Water

Water soaks into materials and cools them, which makes water fire extinguishers good for tackling burning paper, wood and soft furnishings. Water fire extinguishers are dangerous when used on flammable liquids or cooking fats. This is a good device to have in the bedroom and living room, especially if you are a smoker, but not useful for the kitchen.

Foam

Foam extinguishers work by smothering a fire with a layer of film or foam, which starves a fire of oxygen. Foam extinguishers are effective on woods and flammable liquids, petrol and spirits but not for kitchen or electrical fires, making this a handy device to keep in the garage.

CO2

This is effective on flammable liquids and electrical fires, but not suitable for cooking fats or soft furnishings.

Dry powder

This can be used on the widest range of fires in the home. It is safe to use on textiles, wood, flammable liquids/gases and electrical fires. However it cannot be used on kitchen fires involving cooking fats and oils. It's a good device for garages and living areas, but you will still need a separate device for the kitchen.

Wet chemical

This is safe to use on soft furnishings and cooking fat fires, yet hazardous when brought into contact with electrical or flammable gases and liquids. It is good for the living room and kitchen but unsuitable for the garage.

The best thing to do is to make an assessment of the places in your home where you see the greatest potential risks of fires occurring and keep the appropriate devices in an easily accessible place nearby. A fire blanket and wet chemical extinguisher in the kitchen and dry powder device in the garage could prove invaluable tools in saving your home and your life in case of a house fire.