

## **Evacuation Plans and Procedures**

### **Fight or Flee?**

Fire is the most common type of emergency a business may face. A critical decision in planning for this emergency situation is whether or not employees should fight a fire with a portable fire extinguisher. Small fires can often be put out by a well-trained employee with a fire extinguisher but, to do this safely, the employee must understand the uses and limitation of a portable fire extinguisher and the hazards associated with fighting fires, according to OSHA.

Should employees evacuate or be prepared to fight a small fire?

### **Risk Assessment**

Prior to fighting any fire with a portable fire extinguisher, those involved must perform a risk assessment that evaluates the size of the fire, the evacuation route the fire extinguisher users will use and the atmosphere in vicinity of the fire.

### **Characteristics of fires that CAN BE extinguished with portable fire extinguishers:**

- The fire is limited to the original materials ignited
- It is contained in a wastebasket or other receptacle
- The flames are no higher than the fire fighter's head.
- The fire has not depleted the oxygen in the room.

- Heat is being generated but the room temperature is only slightly increased.
- Smoke may be accumulated on the ceiling but visibility is good.
- There is a clear evacuation path behind the fire fighter as he uses the extinguisher.

**Characteristics of fires that SHOULD NOT BE extinguished with portable fire extinguishers:**

- The fire involves flammable solvents and has spread over more than 60 square feet.
- It cannot be reached from a standing position.
- It is partially hidden behind a wall or ceiling.
- The fire cannot be fought without respiratory protection.
- The radiated heat is easily felt on exposed skin making it difficult to approach to within 10-15 feet of the fire.
- Smoke is filling the room very quickly decreasing visibility.
- Fire, heat or smoke may block the evacuation path.