



Engineering

by Erwin Noguera

Now is the time to examine your fire extinguishers for reliability

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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As high occupancy periods in many hotels and resorts start to wind down and the Christmas season approaches, now is the time to think about inspecting life-safety equipment throughout the property. At the forefront of this process should be fire extinguisher inspections. Portable fire extinguishers are the first line of defense against small fires.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has developed a standard for portable fire extinguishers which requires monthly inspection, annual maintenance and proper recharging procedures to be followed to ensure that the extinguisher is ready for its intended use. Last updated in 2002, this standard is known as NFPA 10.

Monthly inspections

NFPA 10 requires that portable fire extinguishers be inspected every 30 days. This inspection process or “quick check” involves verifying that the extinguisher is in its designated location and in plain sight, is readily accessible, that it has not been previously used or tampered with, nor has it been damaged in such a way that could prevent its proper operation. Part of the visual examination also involves checking the pressure gauge to ensure that the needle is in the green zone.

NFPA does not require an engineer or fire inspector to perform this inspection, it can be done by any reliable designee. During annual maintenance, the fire equipment company will place a verification tag on the extinguisher where the signature or initials of the monthly inspector and the date of the inspection may be recorded. The tag must also indicate if the extinguisher has been recharged.

It is recommended that the property’s chief engineer establish a standard timetable and travel route for monthly extinguisher inspections. As a matter of practicality, starting on the hotel’s highest floor and completing the extinguisher inspection for that entire floor before moving down to the next level works well. To ensure accountability and to avoid possible gaps in inspection coverage, always have the same maintenance engineer check all of the property’s extinguishers on the same day, from top to bottom. Do not divide up the duties among several employees. And establish a protocol so that the monthly inspection day will be easily remembered, such as the 1st of every month.

Pictured below: Fire extinguishers should be easily accessible and inspected every month in order to ensure their reliability when needed.



Annual maintenance

According to NFPA 10, “a trained person who has undergone the instructions necessary to reliably perform maintenance and has the manufacturer’s service manual shall service the fire extinguishers not more than one year apart.” Many municipal fire codes will further require that such annual inspections be conducted by fire equipment service agencies who are registered with and authorized by the municipality’s fire department. As part of the annual inspection, the fire equipment safety technician will examine, repair or replace any seals or tamper indicators, as well as removable extinguisher boots, foot rings, and attachments.

Recharging the extinguisher

During the annual inspection and maintenance process, the fire equipment servicing representative will perform any repairs or replacement of damaged components. If the examination shows that the extinguishing agent is low or has been expended, the extinguisher must be recharged. If the extinguisher is a disposable type, it must be replaced. Because of safety considerations and the need for specialized equipment, recharging should always be performed by fire safety equipment specialists.

Every six years, stored pressure fire extinguishers that require a 12-year hydrostatic test shall be emptied and subjected to the applicable maintenance procedures. These procedures include a hydrostatic test that determines whether the cylinder can safely hold the pressurized extinguishing agent and that there are no leaks, cracks, or dents on the cylinder.

Additional responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the chief engineer to secure the contracted services of a reliable and authorized fire equipment service agency for annual maintenance. All engineering employees should also be trained how to conduct monthly quick-checks or to spot indicators of an unreliable extinguisher. Annual maintenance records should be retained in the engineering office beyond the safety equipment's service life up until the state's statute of limitations is reached. ✧

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