Fire Extinguisher Regulations Are Changing

Effective April 20, 2022, recreational boaters will be subject to new fire extinguisher regulations. This has the potential to be confusing, so I’ll unpack it for you! I won’t delve into the specifics of what is changing, but rather I’ll focus on presenting, in lay language, how boaters can easily comply with the new requirements.

For the purpose of this conversation, there are two kinds of portable fire extinguishers. There are disposable extinguishers and rechargeable/serviceable extinguishers. It is important to know which kind you have, or which kind you are buying. All extinguishers must be USCG approved as indicated by the label.

Rechargeable extinguishers can be identified by the label. The label will have language as such: “After Use: Recharge…” (Image1) It will also have a year of manufacture near the UL label (Image 4.) These extinguishers need to be serviced/inspected by a National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) certified technician annually, and will need a current service tag on them.

Disposable portable extinguishers can be identified by a year of manufacture stamped on the bottom (Image 2) and by the language “discard…” (Image 3) on the label. Disposable extinguishers expire, and must be replaced within 12 years of the year of manufacture.

Both disposable and rechargeable extinguishers must be kept in good and serviceable condition to meet the requirements. Good and serviceable means that the gauge reads in the green/charged zone, the pull pin is in place, the handle isn’t damaged, the nozzle is clear of obstructions and there is no obvious damage or corrosion to the bottle. Your fire extinguishers must be kept in a readily available location.

Most of us are familiar with the old fire extinguisher “Type” language. “Type B:C Size I,” for example. Extinguishers of current manufacture will add “Classification 10:B or 10:B-C” (Image 4) as an example, to the label. They retain the “Type” language as well. Model year 2018 and newer boats must have extinguishers with the “Classification” language on the label. Boats manufactured prior to 2018 may still use the “Type” only extinguishers, provided that they are not expired or are current on service/inspection, and they are in good and serviceable condition. As a note, there are very few of the “Type” only extinguishers still in service.

The number 10 above refers to the size or the extinguisher, and the letters B and C refer to the class of fire the extinguisher is designed to extinguish. By running an internet search on “Classes of fires A, B, C” you can learn more about that.

Here’s some good news! If your boat was previously required to carry an extinguisher or extinguishers, it still is. The number of required fire extinguishers hasn’t changed either.

That’s the short and simple of it. If you are still in doubt about whether you are in compliance with the new regulations, here are a couple of things you can do:

\*Read the FAQ’s here: [Fire Extinguishers Requirements for the Recreational Boater FAQ (uscgboating.org)](https://www.uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/fire-extinguisher-faq.php)

\*Join [www.facebook.com/groups/safeboating](http://www.facebook.com/groups/safeboating), and ask us there.

\*If you have an old extinguisher that you aren’t sure about, don’t be afraid to use it for training. Remember PASS. Pull the pin, Aim, Squeeze the handle and Sweep at the base of the fire. You’ll probably want to buy a new one before you use the old one for training.

\* When you go to the store to buy a new one, please know what you are buying. Take it out of the box and look. Read the label. Check the gauge too. I bought one a few years back that gauge showed as discharged! Rechargeable/Serviceable extinguishers (the ones that don’t have a date on the bottom and have “After Use: Recharge” on the label) will require annual service/inspection at an NFPA certified technician. That service will cost about what it costs to buy a new extinguisher. A disposable extinguisher need only be inspected by the boater to ensure it’s not expired, and in good and serviceable condition. We recommend that boaters do this quick inspection prior to each trip.

\*A size 20 extinguisher may serve in the place of two size 5 extinguishers. A size 10 extinguisher will not serve in the place of two size 5’s. On my boat, I am required to have one size 5. I went ahead and got a size 10, because a little extra never hurts.

