

In our continuing series on "Boating Education and Safety", we discuss the topic of fire extinguishers and their requirements for marine use.

Because a fire can destroy your boat and pose a danger to life itself, we must take necessary steps to minimize these consequences. All boats should carry fire extinguishers. They must be U.S. Coast Guard approved or U.L. (Underwriters Laboratories) marine type and must be readily accessible. Please read the label! Most extinguishers are approved only when used with a mounting bracket.

Fire extinguishers are classified by letters and numbers according to the type and size of fire that they can extinguish. The numbers indicate the size (amount of fire extinguishing agent) of the extinguisher and the letters indicate the type of fire the extinguisher can put out.

Types of Fires

A type "A" fire is a combustible solids fire. This would include clothing, wood, paper, etc. It's a solid material that leaves an ash when burned. The best thing to put out a type "A" fire is water, so even though you may have a fire extinguisher rated for type A, B and C fires, keeping a bucket handy can also be a plus.

A type "B" fire is a flammable liquids fire and you would not want to use water on a type "B" fire, as this would spread it. One of the best ways to put out a flammable liquids fire is with foam. As this is generally impractical on a recreational boat, we would have to rely on our fire extinguisher.

A type "C" fire is an electrical fire. We all learned at a very young age that water and elec-

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Safety Equipment Part III

tricity don't mix, so we wouldn't use water or even foam on an electrical fire. We would rely solely on our fire extinguisher. Fire extinguishers filled with carbon dioxide are rated for type A, B and C fires, whereas dry chemical fire extinguishers are rated for only type B and C fires.

Size of Extinguishers

A type B-I extinguisher is the smaller of the Coast Guard approved units and holds two pounds of dry chemical or four pounds of carbon dioxide. A type B-II contains 10 pounds of dry chemical or 15 pounds of carbon dioxide and is larger than the B-I.

Any vessel that has permanently installed fuel tanks or compartments that house portable fuel tanks; closed living spaces; inboard or inboard/outboard engines; closed compartments, in which combustible or flammable materials are

stored, or double bottoms not sealed to the hull or completely filled with flotation material must carry fire extinguishers.

Fire extinguishers should be properly charged and ready for use. They should have either a dial indicator or another form of pressure indicating device. You should never give your fire extinguisher a test shot. The valves or seals may not reseal properly causing the fire-extinguishing agent to leak out. After using your extinguisher, it must be recharged or replaced.

Any vessel less than 26 feet in length, if required to carry extinguishers, must have a minimum of one type B-I on board. Any vessel between 26 feet and less than 40 feet must have two, type B-I extinguishers or one, type B-II. If the vessel is equipped with an approved fixed fire suppression system, then one less B-I is required. Any vessel between 40 feet and 65 feet must have three, B-I extinguishers or one, B-II and one, B-I extinguisher. If the vessel is equipped with an approved fixed-fire suppression system, then one less B-I is required. These are minimum equipment requirements and there is nothing wrong with having an extra fire extinguisher. For example, if you own a 24-foot cabin cruiser, you are required to have only one B-I extinguisher. It would be more advisable to have one in the cabin area and one on the flybridge or in the operators station.

In a future article we will discuss the use of fire extinguishers.

In our next issue we'll discuss backfire flame arrestors, ventilation requirements and sound producing devices. Until then.....Safe Boating.

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