Portable Fire Extinguishers: LBM Key Compliance Areas of Focus

OSHA Standard 1910.157 addresses Portable Fire Extinguishers used in the workplace. This standard is part of 1910 Subpart L – Fire Protection, which also includes specific standards on fixed fire extinguishing systems as well as detection and alarm systems. It is also important to note that 1910 Subpart E – Means of Egress, which includes OSHA Standards 1910.38 – Emergency Action Plans and 1910.39 – Fire Prevention Plans, is also relevant to fire prevention.

The requirements of 1910.157 – Portable Fire Extinguishers apply to the placement, use, maintenance, and testing of portable fire extinguishers provided for the use of employees. It also addresses employee training. However, the Standard does not apply to the selection and distribution of extinguishers outside of workplace buildings or structures. Furthermore, where extinguishers are provided but are not intended for employee use and the employer has an emergency action plan (OSHA Standard 1910.38) and a fire prevention plan (OSHA Standard 1910.39), then only the requirements of the inspection, maintenance and testing and hydrostatic testing sections apply.

OSHA Standard 1910.157 is organized around the following sections: 1) general requirements; 2) exemptions; 3) selection and distribution; 4) inspection, maintenance and testing; 5) hydrostatic testing; and 6) training and education.

Of the requirements specified in Standard 1910.157, the LBM sector has been cited in these areas -

1. Provide portable fire extinguishers and mount, locate, and identify them so that they are readily accessible to employees without subjecting employees to possible injury [1910.157(c)(1)].
2. Assure that portable fire extinguishers are maintained, fully charged, operating properly, and kept in designated places at all times except during use. [1910.157(c)(4)].
3. Inspect, maintain, and test all portable fire extinguishers in the workplace. [1910.157(e)(1)].
4. Visually inspect portable extinguishers or hoses monthly. [1910.157(e)(2)].
5. Perform an annual maintenance check on portable fire extinguishers. Stored pressure extinguishers do not require an internal examination. Record the annual maintenance date and retain this record for one year after the last entry or the life of the shell, whichever is less. Make the record available to the Assistant Secretary upon request. [1910.157(e)(3)].
6. Provide an educational program to familiarize employees with the general principles of fire extinguisher use and the hazards involved with incipient stage fire fighting. [1910.157(g)(1)].

Want to know more? Download NLBMDA's Know Your Portable Fire Extinguisher Responsibilities. Also see NLBMDA's new Portable Fire Extinguisher Checklist, updating the checklist in NLBMDA's Monthly Self Assessment for Warehouses, found in NLBMDA’s EHS Resource Center.