1.0 **Purpose Statement**

FPA Australia has been advised of instances concerning fire extinguisher ruptures during routine servicing, particularly during six-monthly service activities conducted as part of the six-monthly, yearly and five-yearly services as per AS 1851. To reduce the likelihood and impact of this occurring, this Information Bulletin highlights:

- The importance of the safe handling of portable fire extinguishers during servicing
- Where personal protective equipment (PPE) may be required
- What six-monthly service activities require physical inspection and therefore handling of extinguishers

2.0 **Why is safe handling of extinguishers important?**

An extinguisher is a stored pressure container and as such should be handled with care during servicing. Mishandling of an extinguisher during servicing may result in this pressure being released instantly potentially causing physical injury. This risk is increased where the extinguisher is in a compromised condition which may occur as the result of age, being stored in an adverse operating environment or being otherwise subject to damage, or even an unidentified issue caused during the manufacturing process.

3.0 **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**

While it is not required in all circumstances in which extinguishers are serviced, personal protective equipment (PPE)—such as high visibility clothing, safety footwear, hearing/face/eye protection, hard hat or gloves—must be worn where required by the site or where the risk assessment/risk treatment via a Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) or a Job Safety and Environmental Analysis (JSEA) determines PPE is required.

4.0 **Physical inspection of portable fire extinguishers**

Depending on the jurisdiction, the extinguisher installation location (e.g. within a building, a vehicle, etc.) and owner’s requirements, various editions of AS 1851 may be used for the servicing of extinguishers. For the purposes of this document, the requirements of AS 1851-2012 are used as this is the most recent edition of the standard and therefore considered current best practice.

There are a number of physical inspection activities in the six-monthly service activities for portable fire extinguishers included in Table 10.4.1 (six-monthly service) of AS 1851-2012. It should also be noted that the six-monthly activities covered in Table 10.4.1 are required to be conducted as Item 2.1 of Table 10.4.2 (yearly service) and part of Item 3.1 of Table 10.4.3 (five-yearly service) of AS 1851-2012.
Safe handling of portable fire extinguishers during servicing

FPA Australia aims to promote the protection of life, property and the environment from fire and related emergencies.

Three particular physical inspection activities to note include:

1. Weighing the extinguisher to determine that it is fully charged (Item 1.9)
2. Checking the support bracket (Item 1.11)
3. For powder extinguishers, “Invert the extinguisher and ensure that the powder remains free flowing” (Item 1.15)

Note: Physically impacting the extinguisher is not required by AS 1851 in order to ensure the powder remains free flowing.

While other activities in Table 10.4.1 may involve the physical inspection of the extinguisher or extinguisher components, the above activities explicitly require the extinguisher to be removed from the support bracket.

To ensure that the extinguisher is safe to be handled for the abovementioned activities, some of the earlier activities in Table 10.4.1—Items 1.2, 1.5 and 1.6—require checking that the anti-tamper device is intact (and safety pull pin is in place) and checking for external damage or corrosion. If the anti-tamper device (or safety pull pin) is damaged or missing or if the extinguisher is damaged or corroded to the extent that it should be defected, then no further service activities should be conducted as the extinguisher may not be safe to handle.

5.0 Damaged and corroded extinguishers

Where an extinguisher is damaged but can be repaired—and the owner authorises repairs—then it shall be repaired. If the damage cannot be repaired, it shall be condemned. See clause 10.2.10 of AS 1851-2012 for more information.

Where an extinguisher fails the check for corrosion, it shall be condemned. See clause 10.2.6 of AS 1851-2012 for more information.

Condemned extinguishers shall be labelled and returned to the extinguisher owner with a ‘defective component’ report and an ‘action required’ report.

6.0 Recommendations

Safety is paramount and this Information Bulletin aims to provide a reminder that portable fire extinguishers are stored pressure containers capable of rupture and causing injury therefore FPA Australia recommends:

1. When undertaking extinguisher servicing, always identify whether PPE is required.
2. Before handling an extinguisher, always confirm it is safe to be handled (i.e. the anti-tamper device is intact (and safety pull pin is in place) and it is free from damage or corrosion).
3. Extinguishers be handled with care during servicing.
7.0 Disclaimer

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