



RECYCLING FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Fire extinguishers consist of a hand-held cylindrical pressure-vessel, usually made of steel or aluminum, and an agent, which can be discharged to extinguish a fire. There are two main types of fire extinguishers: stored pressure and cartridge operated. Stored pressure fire extinguishers are the most common type and, of these, the ones that have a dry chemical as the agent are most common. The dry chemical is typically mono ammonium sulfate, sodium bicarbonate or potassium bicarbonate – all of which are considered non-toxic.

Are there any hazards to be concerned about with fire extinguishers?

The main concerns are:

- Contents are under pressure and may explode when combined with other materials.
- Very old fire extinguishers (pre-1960's) may contain carbon tetrachloride, a known carcinogen and should not be discharged.

If It's Empty:

- Squeeze the lever above the handle – this will ensure that all contents are discharged.
- Remove the head so that the recycler knows the container is empty.
- Recycle the steel body - once the head is removed, the container can be sent to a metal's recycler.

If It's Not Empty:

- The casing is usually made of steel or aluminum and can be recycled. Recyclers will not accept containers that are not empty, so you must discharge all contents first.

When emptying the container for disposal:

- Discharge outside, away from children or pets.
- For safety, wear goggles and a particulate mask when discharging extinguisher.
- Pull the pin on the extinguisher – this unlocks the operating lever.
- Squeeze the lever above the handle to discharge contents.
- Aim low and discharge contents into a bucket or another container.
- After you have finished discharging the contents and nothing else comes out, remove the head from the container – this will let the recycler know that the extinguisher is empty.

Where to dispose of fire extinguishers:

- Contact your local fire department to see if they will accept them.
- Contact your local [scrap metal recycler](#) to see if they will accept them.
- Take them to a [Household Hazardous Waste Event](#) – pre-registration required.