

Portable Fire Extinguishers — Reading EN 3 Ratings (55A, 233B, C) and Choosing by Risk

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What the rating code on an extinguisher actually certifies — the A number (wood crib size), B number (litres of burning liquid), class C/F marks — and how powder, CO₂, foam and lithium-specific (AVD) types map to workshop, electrical, kitchen and battery risks, with the stocked Housegard range and signage.

The rating is a tested fire size

Under EN 3, an extinguisher's rating is earned on standard test fires. The A number is the length class of a burning wood crib it extinguished (55A beats 43A beats 27A); the B number is the volume class of a burning liquid tray (233B > 183B > 89B > 34B); C marks suitability for gas fires (no numeric rating); F ratings cover fat fryers. So "Powder 6 kg 55A 233B C" certifies: large wood-crib capability, large liquid-tray capability, gas-suitable. Bigger numbers mean more extinguishing performance, not just more agent — a high-efficiency 6 kg can out-rate a mediocre 12 kg.

Types and where they belong

Type | Classes | Stocked examples | Best placed |

ABC powder | A B C | PE6HR-A 6 kg 55A 233B C, PE12HR-A 12 kg, PE2HR-A 2 kg, PE1HR-A 1 kg | Vehicles, workshops, mixed risk; highest rating per kg |

CO₂ | B (electrical practice) | 5 kg 89B, 2 kg 34B | Switchrooms, electronics, kitchens' fringe — no residue |

Foam (PFAS-free) | A B | 6 L 27A 144B, 9 L 34A 183B | Offices, corridors: good A/B with limited mess |

AVD (lithium) | Li-ion battery fires | AVD 6 L | Battery charging/storage areas |

ReUse / service classes | per model | ReUse 6 kg | Sites standardising refillable stock |

Powder's drawback is collateral: a discharge in a server room or galley writes off more than the fire. CO₂ near people outdoors is ineffective (wind) and in tight unventilated spaces is an asphyxiant — placement thinking, not just rating shopping.

Coverage, mounting, signage

Coverage per national workplace rules (travel distance to the nearest unit, minimum rating per floor area/risk class) — the risk assessment fixes counts; the table above fixes types.

Mounting: brackets at the exits and along escape routes, handle height per local practice; vehicle brackets for mobile units (vehicle mount for 6 kg, bracket for 12 kg).

Visibility: location signs perpendicular to the escape route — plough/flag types read along the corridor (plough 15×15, plough 20×20 alu, flag 20×20, flat 15×15 alu).

Inspection regime

Monthly in-house glance: in place, unobstructed, pin sealed, gauge in green, hose sound. Periodic competent-person service and the pressure-test/refill intervals follow the standard your jurisdiction applies (NS 3910 practice in Norway; the service label on the bottle is the record). After any discharge — even a second — the unit is serviced or replaced; a part-used powder never reseals reliably. Train the first-aid-fire response alongside kits and eyewash (first-aid kit Plus) so the extinguisher is the backup to evacuation, not a substitute for it.

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