



GUIDELINE FOR THE CLEANUP OF ABC FIRE EXTINGUISHER DISCHARGES

Type ABC multi-purpose fire extinguishers contain ammonium phosphate and/or ammonium sulfate powders that can be irritating to the eyes, skin and lungs. Caution should be observed to avoid breathing the dust immediately after using the extinguisher as well as when cleaning up discharge residues. When possible, Carbon dioxide (CO₂) fire extinguishers should be used to avoid dealing with the dry chemical problems.

EPA, State of Colorado, and City of Boulder water quality regulations prohibit rinsing phosphates, sulfates, petroleum products or any other deleterious substance into storm sewer inlets, surface water conveyances or floor drains that lead to creeks and waterways; *"Paved surfaces shall be cleaned by dry sweeping, wet vacuum sweeping, collection and treatment of wash water or other methods..."* (City of Boulder Municipal Code, Title 11-Chapter 5, Ordinance 7400 (2004, 11-5-5)). The penalties for unlawful discharges can be substantial. Therefore, it is important to make sure fire extinguisher training sessions address removal and disposal of extinguisher powder (and any spilled fuel) as the last step in the training process.

ABC powders can be swept up, bagged and placed into a dumpster, but avoid sweeping indoors because of the dust. If an extinguisher is discharged indoors the powder can be rinsed into the SANITARY sewer (which goes to the wastewater treatment plant) but be sure the drain chosen does not go to the storm sewer! Avoid using water for cleanup - the powder becomes pasty (and mildly corrosive) when wet, and is more difficult to pick up. Plastic sheeting can be used around fire pans to collect the mess which can then be rolled up and dumpster-disposed. A shop-vac can be used outdoors, but a HEPA vacuum should be used for indoor cleanups to prevent the dispersion of dust into the air.

In any case, please make arrangements to clean up fire extinguisher residues immediately after training. Don't wait until later that day - a sudden storm could quickly rinse contaminants from a parking lot into the storm sewer system and result in Clean Water Act violations.