

Common Myth #13

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I provide my customers with what the code requires, nothing more, nothing less.

Description

“Codes and Standards are often those requirements that are found to be the least offensive to the most people.” – Marv Charney – Kidde-Fenwal

All NFPA standards are **minimum requirements** by definition. As you look at a customer’s facility, keep this in mind.

Are you doing the customer any favors by going with the minimum requirements? Maybe not. How dangerous is the hazard? What is the fire history for that type of operation or industry? What is the customer’s history of fire incidents?

How much more does it cost the customer **over the life of the extinguisher** to have a 10 lb. extinguisher instead of a 5 lb., or a 20 lb. instead of a 10 lb.? Isn’t the cost for annual maintenance going to be the same? How about the cost for six year tear down and hydrotest? If they are worried about recharge costs, then the extinguisher was used and likely paid for itself anyway.

Here are some more things to consider: How do you know how large their fire is going to be? How do you know how many extinguishers and what sizes will be required to extinguish it? If your motivation is to provide better fire protection, can you really be faulted for providing more than what the code or standard requires?

Certainly there isn’t much logic in putting 30 lb. extinguishers every 10 feet in an elementary school. But there also isn’t much logic in having a 6 lb. unit at a gas station or a 5 lb. unit on a tanker truck.

Many of the existing requirements for a 20B:C rating date back to the 1950’s when that was the largest rating any 20 lb. dry chemical fire extinguisher could obtain. Today’s ratings allow that to be achieved with a 6 lb. dry chemical unit or less. Can any 6 lb. dry chemical extinguisher provide as much protection as a 20 lb. dry chemical extinguisher can – regardless of ratings?

There is also the question of choosing the correct agent – what are the consequences of discharging an ABC dry chemical extinguisher in a hospital? In an assisted living facility? In a veterinarian/boarding facility? How about in a Day Care center or elementary school. Around robotics?

NFPA 10 is very clear that the right extinguisher for the right hazard is required and that extinguishers must be installed to protect the general structure and installed to protect the hazard or process going on within the structure.

Along with that, think of choosing the extinguisher and agent combination that will be efficient at extinguishing or controlling the greatest anticipated hazard while causing the least amount of loss or interruption from a discharge.