

Common Myth #33

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You need to turn the extinguisher upside down and hit it with a rubber mallet to fluff the chemical during annual maintenance.

Description

No – In fact this practice can more harm than good.

As stated in “Myth #1” all extinguishers must go through a compaction test with various testing labs and authorities in order to be marketed in North America and around the world. With the exception of some cartridge-operated extinguisher manuals, turning the extinguisher upside down is proven to be unnecessary based on these tests. Within a short time after “fluffing” the dry chemical by turning it upside down and striking it with a mallet, the chemical will go back to the same state as it was before performing this unnecessary task. This is not a problem, as the compaction testing proves that the extinguisher will still discharge the agent – even after sitting on the wall or on a vehicle for a year.

You are REQUIRED to invert cartridge operated extinguishers each time the extinguisher is pressurized. This is required to relieve pressure in the discharge hose and prevent clogging of agent within the hose.

You will not find this requirement in any stored-pressure extinguisher manufacturer’s maintenance manuals. Nor will you find it as a requirement in NFPA 10 either in the body of the standard or in the Annex section. Not only do these publications fail to mention it as a requirement, it is not even a recommendation, nor is it a suggestion.

But here is what can happen when “fluffing” the dry chemical in such a manner:

If you subscribe to the “more is better” philosophy you can dent the shell thus requiring the extinguisher to be scrapped

Less obvious, you can break or damage the gauge. If you don’t believe that, watch the indicator attached to the bourdon tube jump around while you do this.

Paint can be chipped off of the extinguisher shell, allowing corrosion to set in.

On larger units – 20 and 30 lb units as an example – there is no “handle” to hold them upside down so it is easy to have them slip during the process, causing potential injury to both the extinguisher and the technician’s feet. This is a consideration not to be taken lightly when you may be dealing with 50 lbs. or more.

To take this logic to the next step, if this is so necessary, what do you do with wheeled units – get a hoist and a bigger hammer?

Better to spend that time doing what is required by the manufacturer's manuals and NFPA 10: REMOVE the hose and nozzle assembly to confirm that it is clear and without blockage. Conduct a THOROUGH external examination of the extinguisher shell to make sure there is no damage (this may require CLEANING the extinguisher to observe what is under the dirt). Check ALL of the external components for damage/abuse and other conditions – such as mud, dirt or dust building up under the operating levers. Remove all unnecessary tags and labels. Go to NFPA 10 for a full list of the requirements and suggestions as well as the manufacturer's manual.