



Buyer's Guide to Fire Extinguishers (UK)

1. Legal Compliance & British Standards

Key Standards & Regulations:

- BS 5306-3:2017 – Commissioning and maintenance of portable fire extinguishers.
- BS EN 3 – European standard for portable fire extinguishers (performance, classification, labelling).
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) – Requires a responsible person to ensure fire safety, including suitable fire extinguishers.
- BS 5306-8:2012 – Guidance on extinguisher selection and installation.

Legal Requirements:

- Minimum requirement: One Class A extinguisher per 200 m² per floor.
- All extinguishers must be UKCA marked (formerly CE).
- Must be easily accessible, properly installed and maintained annually (unless P50 type – see below).
- Must be commissioned on site by a competent person.

2. Key Questions to Ask Before Buying

1. What fire risks are present?
Identify materials: wood, paper, electricals, cooking oil, chemicals, fuel, etc.
2. Is the extinguisher type suitable for your environment?
Example: Water-based extinguishers are not safe for use on electrical fires.



3. How many extinguishers are required?
Based on risk assessment and floor area (1 Class A per 200 m² minimum).
4. Do you want traditional steel or service-free (P50) models?
P50 models reduce servicing costs and are corrosion-resistant.
5. Do you need a specific colour coding or anti-tamper features?
For high-risk, public, or industrial environments.
6. Who will be responsible for monthly checks and annual servicing?
7. Is wall-mounting or stand placement required?
8. Do you need training for staff on correct use?
9. Do we need signage?
10. What do we do with old extinguishers?
11. How long will an extinguisher last before it needs replacing?

3. Fire Extinguisher Types (Including P50 Models)

Type	Colour Code	Suitable For	NOT For	Key Benefits
Water	Red	Class A: Paper, wood, textiles	Electrical, flammable liquids	Low cost, widely used
Water Mist	White	Class A, B, C, F + Electrical (via de-ionised mist)	Deep fat fryers with large oil volumes	Very safe; eco-friendly; leaves no residue
Foam (AFFF)	Cream	Class A & B: Paper, petrol, oils	Electrical unless specifically rated	Better for mixed fire risk areas



Type	Colour Code	Suitable For	NOT For	Key Benefits
Dry Powder (ABC)	Blue	Class A, B, C, Electrical	Enclosed spaces (can impair visibility & breathing)	Versatile; effective for unknown fire types
CO ₂ (Carbon Dioxide)	Black	Electrical fires & Class B (flammable liquids)	Class A (paper, wood), cooking oil	Clean, no residue; ideal for offices/equipment
Wet Chemical	Yellow	Class F: Cooking oil/fats (deep fryers)	Anything except cooking oil fires	Best for kitchens; cools and seals the fire

P50 Fire Extinguishers (Service-Free Models)

- Composite construction (Aramid & UV-protected polymer).
- No annual service by a technician required — 5-year self-maintenance check by trained in-house staff.
- 10-year warranty, 20-year life cycle.
- Typically available in foam and powder variants.
- No corrosion, no discharge hose deterioration.

Ideal For: Schools, councils, businesses, cost-conscious organisations.



4. Responsibilities of the Buyer / Business Owner

Responsibility	Description
Fire Risk Assessment	Legal requirement to assess fire risks and define needs.
Commissioning	All extinguishers must be commissioned by a competent person when installed.
Installation	Secure mounting or stands; signage required; correct location (e.g. exits, fire points).
Inspection & Servicing	Monthly visual checks (all models); annual maintenance by BAFE-qualified technician (except P50).
Training	Staff must be trained to use the extinguishers safely and appropriately.
Record Keeping	Maintain logbooks of checks, servicing, and training.
Replacement / Disposal	Replace expired, damaged or discharged extinguishers; dispose of in accordance with environmental regulations.

5. Key Factors When Choosing an Extinguisher

Factor	Why It Matters
Fire Class Coverage	Must match fire risk types (e.g. Class F for kitchens, Class B for fuel).
Extinguisher Size	Bigger = longer discharge time, but heavier & bulkier. Common sizes: 2kg, 6kg, 9kg.
Environment	Cold, damp, corrosive, or food-sensitive areas may require special materials (e.g. stainless steel, P50).
Servicing Costs	Traditional steel extinguishers require annual third-party service; P50 can be self-serviced.
Ease of Use	Size, weight, and design affect ease of operation, especially for less-trained staff.



Factor	Why It Matters
Mounting Location	Should be wall-mounted or in a stand at fire points, near exits or risk areas.
British Standards Certification	Look for BS EN 3 and UKCA mark for assurance of performance and compliance.
Warranty / Lifespan	Typical lifespan: 5–10 years (traditional), up to 20 years (P50).
Aesthetics & Branding	Some settings (e.g. hotels, high-end retail) may prefer chromed or coloured variants.

Example: Traditional vs P50 Extinguishers

Feature	Traditional Extinguisher	P50 Extinguisher
Material	Steel	Composite polymer
Annual Servicing Required (technician)	Required	Not required (trained in-house)
Inspection	Monthly visual + annual service	Monthly + 5-year self-service
Lifespan	5–10 years	20 years
Corrosion Resistant	No (can rust)	Yes
Cost Over 10 Years	Higher due to servicing	Lower overall
Ideal For	All environments	Cost-conscious, low-risk premises



Final Checklist Before Buying

Complete fire risk assessment
Confirm extinguisher class matches fire risk
Choose size & weight based on staff and risk
Check for UKCA / BS EN 3 compliance
Plan for installation & signage
Assign responsibility for inspections
Budget for servicing or choose P50
Provide user training
Keep fire safety logbook

Summary

- Every premises in the UK must have appropriate fire extinguishers based on a fire risk assessment.
- Ensure extinguishers are BS EN 3 certified and UKCA marked.
- Choose extinguisher types that match specific fire risks (e.g. CO₂ for electrical, wet chemical for kitchens).
- P50 extinguishers offer long-term cost savings with no annual servicing needed.
- Understand and fulfil your legal responsibilities under UK fire safety law.
- Consider servicing, ease of use, environment, and staff training when purchasing.