



Fire Extinguishers for Commercial Vehicles

The Issue: As a business owner, do you need to provide a fire extinguisher in all company vehicles?

Our Advice: Employers should regard the matter as one to be addressed as a risk management issue and each situation needs to be considered individually.

Some companies have a policy of installing extinguishers to all vehicles whereas other companies are selective in which vehicles are deemed as requiring extinguishers.

Different legislation (e.g. WH&S, dangerous goods, mining, etc.) may apply requirements based on vehicle type, use or load and these requirements may be general or specific. For example, the Transport of Dangerous Goods legislation has very specific requirements where dangerous goods of a particular type, volume and storage are carried and it requires a certain number of extinguishers of a particular rating and classification to be provided.

In accordance with WH&S requirements, a person conducting a business or undertaking at a workplace must ensure that the business is conducted without risk to a person's health and safety. Under all circumstances, employers are obliged to provide:

- safe premises
- safe machinery and materials
- safe systems of work
- information, instruction, training and supervision
- a suitable working environment and facilities

So what should you do?

To determine whether fire extinguishers are required in your company vehicles, you will need to undertake a risk assessment and document your process and findings.

Any vehicle can be considered a place of work (e.g. trucks, vans, harvesters, tradie utes, sales and promotional vehicles, or management sedans). You will need to identify the hazards associated with the use of these vehicles, taking into account what the vehicle is being used for, any hazardous substances/dangerous goods that the vehicle may be carrying, and the size of the vehicle. You also need to assess whether it is used for travel to remote locations.

After you have identified and assessed any hazards and the associated risks, control measures will need to be implemented to control the risks identified. The provision of fire extinguishers in vehicles may be one of those control measures. At this point, Australian Standard 2444 should be adopted to provide guidance for the selection and location of fire extinguishers for vehicles including information regarding minimum rating and classification.

Where it is determined extinguishers are not necessary, it is recommended this be documented and stored as part of your Business Safety Records.

Workplace health and safety authorities in each state and territory and Safe Work Australia have responsibilities for enforcing the OH&S legislation. They provide education, training and advice on health and safety at work. You may wish to seek independent legal advice or contact the relevant regulator(s) (e.g. WorkSafe or the Department of Transport) for assistance relevant to your circumstances.