Report on a fire extinguisher fatality which occurred recently. A similar incident which occurred at another facility in 1988. Two important lessons can be learned from these tragedies. First, beware of potential corrosion areas, i.e., near cooling towers or extinguishers stored for long periods of time unprotected by weather. The second is instructing employees to look for signs of corrosion and not charging an extinguisher with their body over the extinguisher. Please remind your employees and contractors of this hazard.

A Fire Watch was killed when he applied a hand held fire extinguisher to extinguish a small smoldering fire. Part of the bottom of the extinguisher cracked open when the internal CO2 cylinder opened (225 psi/17 bar) hitting the fire watch in the chest.

The cause of the incident is corrosion of the cylinder under the rubber protective foot. Water entered the rubber lining causing serious corrosion. The vendor distributed a warning to all owners of this type of fire extinguishers saying that annual inspection must include visual inspection of the bottom of the cylinder after the rubber foot has been removed.

Of course fire extinguisher training must include a warning and user instruction to avoid a failing extinguisher to hit the worker. In this case however a professional, certified fire watch used the extinguisher. It is assumed that the type of failure of the extinguisher must have caused a sideways direction change.

This fire extinguisher had a plastic or rubber base to protect the bottom. The design resulted in moisture being trapped inside the base that may have prevented corrosion on the bottom of the extinguisher from being detected during inspections. Following the incident, a number of other extinguishers of the same make and type were checked and found to be seriously corroded.

It is possible that extinguishers from other manufacturers have a similar design. Extinguishers of this type may be widely used in your projects, plants, offices, warehouses, maintenance shops, etc. If your fire extinguishers have plastic or rubber bases, these should be removed and each fire extinguisher carefully inspected by a Competent Person immediately.

Please see the attached photograph.