Common Myth #18

Cartridge-Operated extinguishers are easier to maintain.

Description

We don't think so, and if you do it right, you probably won't either. Take a close look at the manufacturer's inspection, recharge and maintenance manual. Start counting the steps and tools that are required to perform an annual maintenance according to the manufacturer's instructions.

There seems to be two very different perceptions about the annual service of cartridge operated extinguishers. On one hand, distributors are given detailed knowledge about how to properly service one of these units. It requires hand held scales accurate to within 1/4 to 1/8 of an ounce and involving up to more than 40 checkpoints along with nearly a tear-down of the extinguisher. On the other hand, end users are told that they can service these extinguishers themselves because they are so simple. "No special tools are required and very little is needed to maintain them." You can't have it both ways.

Stored pressure extinguishers represent a much more modern, efficient and simple design. There are far fewer parts, seals and other components involved and therefore fewer items to be checked (and fewer things that can go wrong). With the exception of a one state and a few local authorities, stored-pressure extinguishers do not have to be discharged and recharged in order to accomplish an annual maintenance.

Cartridge operated extinguishers represent technology that dates back to the early 1900's, use a lot more parts and seals (more on this later). If you look at the manufacturer's instructions for annual maintenance procedures and requirements, you will see it amounts to an annual tear down regardless of what the local authority dictates.

Cartridge operated extinguishers, like any other piece of emergency equipment, should only be maintained by trained personnel – professionals like yourself – who know what is required by both local codes and the manufacturers' manuals to assure that the equipment is ready to perform when needed.