

Fighting vehicle fires becomes Element(al)

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(Photo: Larry Edsall / Special to The Detroit News)

The National Fire Protection Association reports that in 2015, nearly 175,000 vehicles — cars, trucks, motorcycles, buses, trailers — caught fire on American roads, killing 445 people and injuring another 1,500.

Owners of classic, customized and racing cars frequently, if not always, carry fire extinguishers in their vehicles. Do you?

Yes, we know, fire extinguishers are bulky and space in modern cars is at such a premium that many of them no longer have room for even a spare tire. But there's a new style of fire extinguisher coming to the North American market that makes it much easier to carry along proper protection.

Element is the brand name for a fire-extinguishing system, developed and produced in Italy, that has become popular in Europe and Asia and is being imported in North America by a Toronto-based company.

Although they realize the largest market for the Element will be residential, brothers Paul and Robert Calisi are car guys — they recently completed the restoration of a Ferrari Dino — who used the recent SEMA Show, the trade show for the automotive aftermarket industry, to debut Element in North America.

Element extinguishers use a potassium nitrate-based agent that is contained in a non-pressurized state in a small, tubular container. According to the brothers and their company literature, the technology was developed for the international space exploration effort and attacks fires at a molecular level by interrupting the chain of combustion, which it does without leaving a post-fire residue.

Element extinguishers are rated for use in Class A (wood, coal, trash), Class B (flammable liquids and gases), Class C (electrical fires up to 100,000 volts) and Class K (cooking oil and grease) fires.

The Element extinguisher works much like an old-fashioned road flare: Remove the top cap, remove the striker from the bottom of the unit, grasp the black handle and strike the exposed top with the striker, directing the agent at the fire from a distance of up to 6-8 feet.

The extinguisher is available in three sizes — E25, E50 and E100 — which discharge, respectively, for 25, 50 and 100 seconds. Prices range from \$49 for the E25 to \$79 for the E100. Because contents are not pressurized, no annual service is needed, as with a traditional extinguisher.

If you want to spend more money, the brothers will sell you a custom-designed carbon fiber holder for your Element. They also produce Carbonio composite automotive parts — from engine covers and paddle shifters to cup holders and license plate holders.

For information and to see a video of the Element in action, visit www.elementfire.com.

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