Fireproof Cabinets

Q1. What does the UL rating on a fireproof cabinet mean?

A: UL (Underwriters Laboratories) ratings indicate how long a cabinet can protect its contents in a specific fire temperature before the interior reaches a damage threshold. Key ratings: UL Class 350 (1-hour, 2-hour) means the interior won't exceed 350°F for the rated time period — protecting paper documents. UL Class 150 protects magnetic media, CDs, and USB drives (those are damaged above 150°F). UL Class 125 protects film and floppy discs. For standard paper documents: Class 350, 1-hour minimum. For digital media: Class 150. Always ask what you're protecting before recommending a rating.

Q2. What's the difference between a fire-resistant file cabinet and a truly fireproof cabinet?

A: Very few cabinets are truly fireproof — the term means they protect contents for a defined period. 'Fire-resistant' and 'fireproof' are used interchangeably in marketing, but the meaningful standard is the UL rating. A 1-hour UL Class 350 cabinet protects paper contents for one hour in a fire reaching 1700°F. A 2-hour version doubles that protection time. The distinction that matters: fire rating (and duration) versus no rating at all. An unrated cabinet claiming 'fire protection' provides essentially none.

Q3. Do I need a 1-hour or 2-hour rated fire cabinet?

A: One hour is the minimum commercial standard and sufficient for most offices. Two-hour rated cabinets are heavier, more expensive, and designed for situations where fire suppression response may be delayed or documents are exceptionally critical. Insurance requirements sometimes specify 2-hour ratings. If your business has a document retention policy that references fire protection, check whether it specifies a minimum rating. For most small to mid-size offices, a 1-hour UL 350 cabinet is the right recommendation.

Q4. Can I use a fireproof cabinet for storing firearms?

A: Fire-resistant file cabinets and gun safes serve different purposes. A fire-resistant cabinet protects documents from fire. A gun safe is designed to prevent unauthorized access (theft deterrent) and may or may not have fire rating. If you need to store firearms and protect them from both theft and fire, look for a gun safe with both UL fire rating AND steel construction rated for burglary resistance. Don't use a document fire cabinet to store firearms — it's not designed for theft prevention.

Q5. How heavy are fireproof cabinets?

A: Very heavy. The fire-resistant insulation filling the walls of a fireproof cabinet adds substantial weight. A standard 2-drawer letter-size fireproof file cabinet weighs 100-200 lbs empty. A 4-drawer model can exceed 400 lbs. Always verify the floor weight capacity for upper floors — most residential floors can handle this, but older buildings sometimes have weight limits. Check whether your building's elevator can handle the delivery weight before ordering for upper floors.

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Q6. Will a fireproof cabinet protect against water from fire suppression?

A: Standard fire-resistant cabinets protect against fire heat but do not guarantee waterproof protection from fire suppression water. Some cabinets are rated for water resistance or include a water seal gasket — look for 'impact and water resistance' in addition to fire rating. This is labeled as 'impact/explosion rated' in UL testing. If water damage from suppression systems is a concern (and it should be), specify a cabinet with water seal protection in addition to the fire rating.

Q7. Do fireproof cabinets need special installation or anchoring?

A: Anchoring is recommended because fire events sometimes involve building collapse, falling debris, or floor failure. A heavy fireproof cabinet that tips over or falls through to a lower floor loses its protection value. Most fireproof file cabinets include anchoring hardware. Anchor to the floor through the base, not just the wall — floor anchoring is more stable for very heavy cabinets. Also note that fireproof cabinets should not be installed in rooms with sprinkler heads directly above, as water from sprinklers can enter open drawers.

Q8. What types of documents should be stored in a fireproof cabinet?

A: Critical documents that are difficult or impossible to replace: original contracts, deeds, corporate formation documents, original signed agreements, insurance policies, patents, personnel records, financial records, and any documents required for business continuity. Do NOT use a fireproof cabinet as general filing — it fills up quickly and devalues the protection for truly critical documents. Have a document classification system: 'vault-worthy' documents go in the fireproof cabinet; everything else goes in regular filing.

Q9. What's the best lock type for a fireproof cabinet?

A: Standard options: key lock, combination dial, and electronic keypad. Key locks are most common and least expensive but require key management. Combination locks eliminate physical keys but must be managed and reset periodically. Electronic keypad locks allow multiple user codes and audit trail features at higher cost. For high-security environments or shared access requirements, electronic keypads with audit logs are worth the investment. Master key access for the facility manager is important for emergency access.

Q10. Are fireproof data storage cabinets different from document cabinets?

A: Yes — critically different. Data media (USB drives, hard drives, CDs, DVDs) is damaged at temperatures above 150°F — much lower than the 350°F threshold that protects paper. A standard Class 350 fire cabinet will protect paper but destroy digital media in the same fire. If you're protecting digital media, you need a UL Class 150 media cabinet specifically rated for data protection. Confirm what you're protecting before specifying any cabinet.