

Matchcover Enigmas #4

The Self-Extinguishing Match

Now, come on. How many commercial products can you think of off the top of your head that are *purposefully* designed to be self-destructive? Not my washing machine. Not my car. Not my computer. *[Well, OK, I sometimes wonder about the latter]* But, the self-extinguishing match is!

Yes, I know. It's a safety feature so that your cute and cuddly little grandson won't burn the house down when he plays with matches. But the flip side of that is that intrepid Arctic explorer is going to freeze to death because he can't start a fire using self-extinguishing matches; that lovely young (and dare I say, scantily clad) woman marooned on a desert island is never going to be rescued because she can't light a signal fire with those darned self-extinguishing matches; and, worst of all, it's practically impossible to light my pipe with a %\$!(*&^ self-extinguishing match! *[It often took me 3 or 4 such matches to get my pipe lit. I've since solved that problem, however. Now, I simply bundle 2 or 3 such matches together and light them all at once...I just have to make sure that my eyebrows are well out of range]*

The self-extinguishing match goes all the way back to 1916, and by 1929 the Bureau of Standards had already developed such at the request of a particular congresswoman. Since then, there have been quite a few patents for such a match type. Of course, in a more cynical perspective, this could be a diabolical business strategy to get the match user to use several matches when, ordinarily, one would suffice. Still, the whole idea is something of an enigmatic paradox.

[Note: Atlas's Stop Lite self-extinguishing match, pictured here, is only one type of many that exist]

