

A WINEGROWERS' GUIDE TO PREPARING FOR WILDFIRES

With cyclical droughts and recent wildfires in wine regions throughout the state, it is important for winegrowers and wineries to be prepared for fire.

The following checklist includes a list of key steps to ensure that your property and staff are prepared for a fire, based on guidance from Gregory Slugoeki, Independent Fire Consultant, CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Scott McLean and the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (Slugoeki, 2016 and IBHS, 2015).

STEP ONE: SPEAK WITH YOUR LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT

Find out who your local first responder is, how long it will take them to get to your location, how much water the trucks will be carrying and how long it will take the trucks to refill. This will give you an idea of how much water you may need to supplement from your property.

Request that your local responder conducts a site visit of your property to assess fire preparedness. Contact CAL FIRE for more information on “pre-planning” at fire.ca.gov.

Ask your local responder if they have on hand all equipment needed to fight fire at your property, and determine if there is specific equipment you must have on site. Check that you are using standard tank and nozzle fittings or have the appropriate adaptors on hand. Note that it is not the responsibility of CAL FIRE or your local responder to have a variety of nozzles in hopes one will fit your tank. Uniformity of hose fittings can save time and lives during a fire.

STEP TWO: PREPARE EMPLOYEES

Determine where all access points to water on your property are located and ensure that they are well-marked, illustrated on a map and known to all employees.

TAKE ACTION

For more information on preparing for wildfires see [CAL FIRE's Fire Prevention](#) resources.

Develop an emergency disaster plan for fire (including an evacuation plan), and conduct drills with your staff on what to do in case of a fire. All employees should keep a cell phone nearby and call 911 immediately in case of fire.

If any employees do not speak English, ensure there is information and training in their primary language.

Check with your local fire agency to understand regulations related to fire countermeasures and check with your insurance provider about whether your staff is allowed to begin fire countermeasures. If so, ensure that your staff is adequately trained and prepared to fight fires with the correct equipment (e.g., hoses, pumps, water trucks).

Ensure adequate and safe access to the winery and around the vineyard for firefighting equipment and alternative emergency routes for vineyard and winery employees and/or residents that may be on the property during a fire. Access can be compromised if fire vaporizes plastic road culverts or if roads are not up to fire equipment access standards.

STEP THREE: PREPARE YOUR PROPERTY/FACILITY

Make sure smoke detectors have fresh batteries, and fire extinguishers are ready to use.

Be knowledgeable about where flammable chemicals, diesel and gasoline are stored in order to minimize fire risk (e.g., do not store all extremely flammable materials in a location that could put other facilities at risk) and update farm buildings using ignition resistant and noncombustible materials, including roofs, siding, chimneys, vents, doors, and windows, to “harden” your building(s) from flying embers.



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Ensure your landscaping is adequately watered.

Ensure that you have a 100-foot defensible zone around your structures, and clear any dead plants, trees, branches, or debris from your property. To learn more about creating a defensible zone, visit readyforwildfire.org.

Keep roofs free of leaves, needles, or other vegetative materials and remove any portion of a tree that extends within 10 feet of the outlet of a chimney or stovepipe. Maintain trees, shrubs, or other plants adjacent to or overhanging buildings free of dead or dying wood.

If you have an older facility, consider installing a sprinkler system if one has not already been installed.

If not installed already, consider installing a water tank (used for fire prevention and irrigation) in order to supplement water on fire trucks. Dispersing several smaller tanks dedicated as fire water around the property can be effective in containing wide-spread fire.

Regularly monitor the amount of water in your tank(s), test valves and make sure staff are trained to use pumps that will be used to disperse water in the event of a fire.



To use water from a pond on your property, the fire responder must be equipped with materials such as folding tanks, float dock strainers, hoses and supply line holders. Ask your local responder today if there is any specific equipment you should have on site.

Lawn mowers are designed to mow lawns, not weeds or dry grass. Metal blades striking rocks can create sparks and start fires. Use caution.

In wildland areas, spark arresters are required on all portable gasoline-powered equipment (this includes tractors, harvesters, chainsaws, weed-eaters and mowers). Grinding and welding operations require a permit and 10 feet of clearance. Keep a shovel and a fire extinguisher ready to use.

Download *A Winegrowers' Guide to Navigating Risk* for more information on using sustainable practices and reducing risk: [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

STEP FOUR: REDUCE WORK-RELATED FIRE RISK

Extreme caution should be taken starting any kind of engine, and engines should be started over sand or dirt, if possible.

Vehicles should never be idled or parked with the engine running (or hot motors) over dry grasses or flammable materials.

Safe equipment use includes mowing before 10 a.m. (but never when it's windy or excessively dry) using the recommended fuel grade (and not topping it off), not driving mowers onto dry grass or brush (hot exhaust pipes and mufflers can start fires) and keeping the exhaust system spark arresters in proper working order and free of carbon buildup.

Employees using machinery in high fire risk area should be accompanied by a water tanker with a hose and pump, if possible. Smoking should be prohibited in any high fire risk area.

TAKE ACTION

Help prevent wildfires by ensuring you are using farm equipment safely. See readyforwildfire.org



REFERENCES:

[California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. CAL FIRE Fire Prevention Links](#)

[Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety: Wildfire Preparedness Resources](#)

[Fire at the Winery. National Storage Tank, Slugocki, G. \(2015\)](#)

[Office of Congressman Mike Thompson: Fire Recovery Guide](#)