

Wildfire Safety Checklist for **Wineries** from **Winery Pak®**



For wineries in wildfire-prone areas, preventative safety measures have never been more crucial following the devastating 2017 California wildfire season. Despite being considered by fire officials to be a natural firebreak because of the moisture-rich open space of vineyards, wineries were hit particularly hard.⁽¹⁾ More than 30 were completely destroyed or suffered serious damages, with damage estimates over \$3 billion.⁽²⁾ With the 2018 fire season already showing unprecedented destruction follow this checklist for important tips and actionable measures for wildfire preparedness.

Assess Your Wildfire Risk

- ☐ Be aware of the fire danger level in your area at all times. Be aware of recent prolonged periods without rain that increase the risk of wildfire.
- ☐ Consider having a professional inspect your property and offer recommendations for reducing the wildfire risk.
- ☐ Know your community's wildfire response plan. Are roads leading to your property clearly marked and wide enough for firefighting equipment? Is your property address visible from the roadside?
- ☐ Contact your local fire department, forestry office, emergency management office or building department for information about local fire laws, building codes and protection measures.

Reduce Your Wildfire Risk

BOOST THE FIRE RESISTANCE OF YOUR WINERY STRUCTURES

- ☐ Secure structural vulnerabilities. Small gaps and openings leave large structures vulnerable to infiltration by embers.
 - Ensure garage or large doors close completely and seal gaps with weather stripping.
 - Cover chimneys and stovepipes with spark arrestors made of 12-gauge welded or woven wire mesh screen with openings 1/2 inch across. Chimneys create a hazard when embers escape through the top. To prevent this, install spark arrestors on all chimneys, stovepipes and vents for fuel burning heaters. Ask your fire department for exact specifications.
 - Cover building vents & openings with 1/4 inch or smaller corrosion-resistant wire mesh. Any attic vent, soffit vent, louver or other opening can allow embers and flaming debris to enter a structure and ignite it. Install a metal flashing strip about 18 inches tall where a pergola, fence or other structure is attached to a primary structure.
- ☐ Consider replacing combustible building materials with fire-resistant ones, such as stucco and metal.



BOOST THE FIRE RESISTANCE OF YOUR WINERY STRUCTURES (CONT.)

- ☐ Roofs are especially vulnerable in a wildfire. Embers and flaming debris can travel great distances, land on the roof and ignite. Avoid flammable roofing materials such as wood, shake and shingle. Materials that are more fire resistant include single ply membranes, fiberglass shingles, slate, metal, clay and concrete tile.
- ☐ Install treated windows to reduce the risk of radiated heat passing through and igniting combustible materials inside. The larger the pane of glass, the more vulnerable it is to fire. Dual- or triple-pane thermal glass, and fire resistant shutters or drapes, help reduce the wildfire risk. Install noncombustible awnings to shield windows and use shatter-resistant glazing such as tempered or wire glass.
- ☐ Clear gutters of leaves and debris that can catch fire.
- ☐ Enclose the undersides of sun decks and porches. Any porch, balcony or overhang with exposed space underneath is fuel for an approaching fire. Overhangs ignite easily by flying embers and by the heat and fire that gets trapped underneath.

REMOVE COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS FROM AROUND STRUCTURES

- ☐ Identify and move combustible materials away from all structures. Stack firewood 100 feet away and uphill from any structure. Wooden tables outside tasting rooms, and gas grills and propane tanks should be kept at least 15 feet from any building. Clear an area 15 feet around the grill. Place a 1/4 inch mesh screen over the grill.
- ☐ Keep collection bins and pallets away from winery and other structures.

CREATE A DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Defensible space practices include:

- Increasing the moisture content of vegetation
- Decreasing the amount of flammable vegetation
- Shortening plant height
- Altering the arrangement of plants
- ☐ Create a 30-foot safety zone around all buildings. Keep the volume of vegetation in this zone to a minimum. If your winery is on a hill, extend the zone on the downhill side. Fire spreads rapidly uphill. The steeper the slope, the more open space you will need to protect your winery structures.
- ☐ Follow the “Lean, Clean, and Green Checklist” for this 30-foot Safety Zone:
 - **LEAN** – small amounts of flammable vegetation. Deciduous ornamental trees and shrubs are acceptable if they are kept green and free of dead plant material, and individual plants or groups of plants are arranged so that adjacent wildland vegetation cannot convey a fire through them to the structure. Where permitted, most wild land shrubs and trees should be removed from this zone. Thin a 15-foot space between tree crowns. Minimize the use of ornamental coniferous shrubs and trees such as juniper, monterey pine and tall exotic grasses such as pampas grass. Become familiar with local requirements before removal of wildland vegetation.
 - **CLEAN** – no accumulation of dead vegetation or other flammable debris. Cut the lawn often. Remove ladder fuels: clear the zone of leaves, brush, dead limbs and fallen trees. Trees should be trimmed to a minimum of 10 feet above the ground, and tree limbs within 10 feet of a chimney, encroaching on powerlines, or touching the structure. Use mulches, rock, and non-combustible hard surfaces (concrete sidewalks, brick patios, and asphalt driveways) to create a fuel break.
 - **GREEN** – plants are healthy and green during the fire season. Use low growing herbaceous (non-woody) plants such as lawn, clover, a variety of groundcovers, bedding plants, bulbs, perennial flowers, and conservation grasses.

- ☐ Create a second zone at least 100 feet around the structure. This zone should begin about 30 feet from the structure and extend to at least 100 feet. In this zone, reduce or replace as much of the most flammable vegetation as possible. If the topography of your vineyard is hilly, you may need to extend the zone for several hundred feet to provide the desired level of safety.

Prepare for A Wildfire Evacuation

- ☐ If you have an emergency water source (pool, pond, etc.) and/or portable pump, clearly mark its availability so it can be seen from the street.
- ☐ Keep an up-to-date inventory of winery equipment structures and furnishings (consider video taping and photographing).
- ☐ Have computer backup files ready.
- ☐ Place vehicles in a garage or enclosed structure, pointing out with keys in ignition; keep the gas tank at least half full.
- ☐ Disconnect the electric garage door opener for manual operation.
- ☐ Close all interior doors & leave a light on in each room.
- ☐ Radiant heat is a major cause of ignition within structures of close proximity. Consider taking down blinds/drapes/shades/curtains from windows before evacuating.
- ☐ Close fire resistant drapes.
- ☐ Move furniture to the center of the room.
- ☐ Shut off main gas supply to house.
- ☐ Close all exterior vents if possible.
- ☐ Prop a ladder against each structure to provide firefighters access to the roof.
- ☐ Make sure all garden hoses are connected and have spray nozzles attached.
- ☐ Unlock and close all exterior doors and windows.
- ☐ Turn on outside lights.
- ☐ If time allows, cover windows, attic openings and vents with plywood one-half inch thick.
- ☐ Consider moving equipment or vehicles into vineyard before evacuations, time permitting.

Personal Safety

- ☐ Develop an emergency plan and train your employees for an emergency evacuation.
- ☐ Plan several escape routes in case roads are blocked by a wildfire.
- ☐ Wear fire safe attire including cotton or wool long pants, long sleeved shirt or jacket and boots.
- ☐ Carry gloves, goggles, a handkerchief to cover your face and drinking water.
- ☐ Keep a flashlight and portable radio with you at all times.
- ☐ Vineyards themselves are a superior firebreak. If roads become impassable and you are trapped on the property move to the center of vineyard for protection.
- ☐ Know your terrain. Property accessed by winding or narrow roads or within low valleys and canyons pose a significant risk. Wind driven fire moves quickly and unpredictably in this topography. Residents can become easily overwhelmed by fast moving flames. Begin to evacuate with first signs a fire is near, do not wait for direction from first responders.

SOURCES

1. CBS News
2. LA Times Vineyards may have kept wine country fire from getting worse By GEOFFREY MOHAN OCT 12, 2017
3. Avoiding Wildfire Damage: A Checklist for Homeowners FEMA



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