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CANADIAN VINEYARD & WINERY MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE

Shut the front door!

Church & State Wines' Lost Inhibitions line let the bottles do the talking

Ready to trade up

The TPP Agreement holds the promise of opening up new markets for Canadian wines



Dousing the flames

Winery fire prevention tips

Dousing the flames

Tips for protecting your winery from fire

By Ashlee Espenell



Storing stock in a fire-safe building can help reduce your insurance premiums.

Imagine watching a line of red flames bleed across the horizon and wondering if it had managed to reach your fields, your storage sheds or your winery. That was the reality vineyards and wineries faced in the Okanagan Valley this past summer. In the thick of things was Road 13 Vineyards, which found itself within just 10 metres of a blazing wildfire in August.

Owner Mick Luckhurst, his crew and volunteers from Mission Hill Family Estate Winery worked to prevent the spread of flames by clearing away 20 metres of

sage brush along the hillside between his farm and the fire. They soaked rooftops and plugged the drains on flat-roof buildings, filling them up with six inches of water so they couldn't burn. They also moved CO₂, nitrogen, diesel, and all other flammable materials to safety at the front of the property.

Road 13 got lucky. Nothing burned and none of their grapes were tainted by the smoke. Wildfires are a way of life for the region though and Luckhurst has taken steps to help prevent future wildfires from getting that close.

"Since then, I've taken my irrigation system and ran it up to the top of all of our rows, close to the bush line," said Luckhurst. "We put sprinkler heads on every second post along our deer fence. If we need to we can spray water up to 15 metres now and drench the hillside."

Other hazards

All commercial businesses can find themselves at some risk of fire – as the Le Caveau Restaurant and Domaine de Grand Pré winery in Grand Pré, Nova Scotia learned in December 2012.



PHOTO FROM MICK LUCKHURST, ROAD13VINEYARDS.COM

Road 13 Vineyards on August 16, 2015, the morning after a wildfire scorched hills behind the property.

EVERYDAY FIRE- PREVENTION TIPS FOR WINERIES AND VINEYARDS

- Regularly value all buildings, equipment, stock and finished stock to ensure you have enough insurance coverage, and have it formally appraised every three or five years.
- Ensure your fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, smoke alarms, and sprinkler systems are maintained and inspected regularly.
- Fuel sources and other flammable materials should be handled and stored properly, and not left next to your winery, restaurant, or stock storage buildings.
- If your operation is threatened by a wildfire, move all flammable materials like chemicals and fuel, inventory, field equipment, office equipment, and business records out of danger zones. Fill tanks and pumps with water to keep on hand to put out spot fires.
- Have an emergency action plan and evacuation plan and be ready to implement it. Also make sure that any employees and volunteers know when, how, and where to evacuate.
- Ensure emergency vehicles can access your property by moving equipment and clearly marking access roads ahead of time.
- Clear roofs and gutters of debris and remove any dead plants, trees, wood, and other flammable debris so it can't ignite. Also clear any branches that extend within six feet of any building.
- Signature Risk Partners recommends investing in a centrally managed alarm system, which not only protects against theft, but can also detect heat and fire and alert emergency services for you.
- They also recommend storing important documents and files in a fire-resistant safe.

"We had just finished dinner service and were cleaning up for the night when the sous chef noticed an abnormal amount of smoke in the kitchen," said Beatrice Stutz, manager and owner. "We called the fire department right away. When they opened up the floorboards, flames shot out."

The heat from the stove in the kitchen had transferred to the wood floor, which self ignited and had been smoldering for several days. There hadn't been enough smoke to trigger smoke detectors or the winery's alarm monitoring system. The kitchen and the dining room ceiling had to be replaced and they weren't able to work in the third-floor office space for several weeks.

"In their mind I think everybody does whatever they can to prevent something like a fire," said Stutz. "You do the inspections and make sure things are turned off – normal preventative measures. But sometimes accidents do happen."

Fortunately, Le Caveau Restaurant is in a separate building than the rest of the winery, so the fire was contained. They lost the last two weeks of the restaurant's operating season, but were still able to re-open in April for the new season.

Insuring against loss

"Any commercial property insurance policy will include fire protection," said James Grant, president & CEO of Signa-

ture Risk Partners Inc. in Toronto. "Fortunately, fire doesn't happen frequently, but it's the number-one reason people buy insurance."

Insuring your winery property against damage from fire is just part one.

"Fire is also a major cause of business interruption and many commercial insurance policies do not automatically cover things like ongoing operating expenses and the break-down or repair of essential winemaking equipment," said Grant. "Owners need to ensure that their current policy also covers essential ongoing expenses like payroll if they have a fire."

Reducing insurance costs through fire prevention

"There are a lot of things that a winery owner can do that will save them money in annual insurance premiums over the long run," said Joe Hannigan, VP and director of wine at Signature Risk Partners Inc., a specialist for the company's Signature Wine Insurance Program. "Probably the most important thing is to invest in a sprinkler system. Having a sprinkler system can save you as much as 20 per cent annually on your insurance premium, which will pay for the cost of the system over time.

"Other things that can help to reduce annual premiums include storing finished stock in a fire-safe building and using a centrally monitored alarm system." ♦