

Preparing Your Vineyard for Fire

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During the fire danger period there are actions to be taken to reduce the risk of fire damage to your vineyard.

- Determine the likely direction of a fire front. Uncontrolled fires generally occur with hot northerly winds. However they can be followed by a cool change and the winds change to a south westerly direction, usually with strong gusts, hence the fire front changes direction and will become broader.
- It is preferable to not have vineyards planted right up to a forested area as the radiant heat from the burning forest can damage vines for some distance, as well as provide more problems with embers dropping into the vineyard.
- Ploughed paddocks around a vineyard will stop the fire running into the vineyard but won't prevent embers landing in the vineyard.
- If paddocks cannot be ploughed, then graze or slash them down heavily to reduce the fuel load and bale the straw for removal.
- Encourage neighbours to undertake fire reduction procedures where their property abuts your vineyard.
- Slash grass down low between the vine rows and undervine if you don't have a weed-free area undervine.
- Hay or stubble mulches undervine can cause severe damage to the vine trunk if the mulch burns - remove any grassy mulches from the undervine area.
- Well composted mulches or organic compost are less prone to burning but can still catch alight and damage vine trunks.
- If overhead irrigation is available irrigate before the fire front arrives to dampen down vines and posts.
- Protect chemical stores, fuel storages, workshops, machinery sheds, etc. by reducing the fuel load around these structures, cleaning spouting of leaves, blocking gaps that allow entry of embers and having access to water to control any outbreak of fire.
- Protect pumps, power poles, electrical switch boards, and irrigation infrastructure in the vineyard against fire. Exposed plastic pipes can readily melt in a blaze. Electricity may be lost if fire is widespread so have a back up power supply available on site.
- Plastic drip line is readily damaged by fire. Ensure back up supplies are quickly available in the event drip lines need replacing. It will be important to rehydrate vines as soon as possible after a fire.
- Trellis posts may also burn in a fire and the trellis system may collapse. Have an alternative supply of posts available (not necessarily on your property) to access if necessary.
- Have a spray tank on hand for putting out spot fires around the property. Extreme care is needed if entering between rows of vines because of the limited escape route if fire flares up around you.

- Dams are available as helicopter fill sites so don't string wires over dams and consider keeping vegetation back from the edge of the dam for helicopter access. Water removed from a dam that is deemed essential for fire fighting can be reinstated.
- Have proper fire fighting equipment, clothing and footwear on hand if you decide to stay and fight the fire and ensure the equipment is operational.
- Ensure fire fighting vehicles can access your property and any 'dead end' tracks are marked – **but don't rely on a fire truck being available to assist you.**
- Observe the fire restrictions to avoid being the cause of a fire, i.e. don't slash grass on high risk days.

Information Sourced from:

<http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/wine-and-grapes/preparing-your-vineyard-for-fire>