SMOKE EXPOSURE

# Spotlight

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
WEST COAST SMOKE EXPOSURE TASK FORCE



NOVEMBER 2026




## Checking Qualifying Smoke Days for FIP-SI

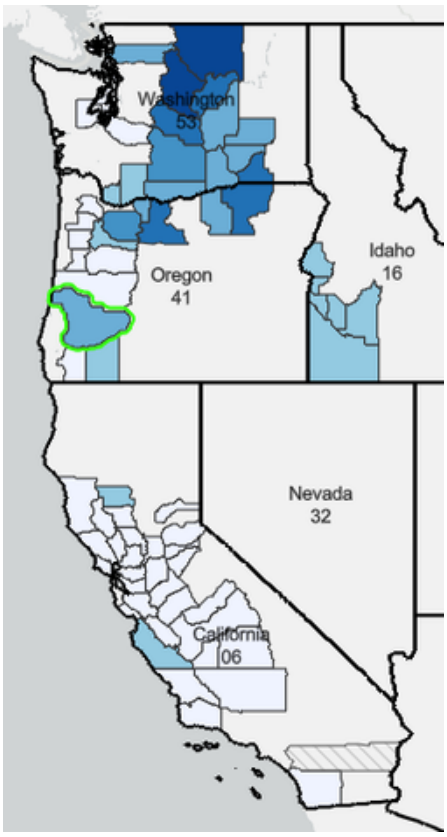
### What is FIP-SI?

Offered for the first time in 2025 in California, Fire Insurance Protection-Smoke Index (FIP-SI) is an area-wide endorsement you can stack on your Grape Crop Provisions policy for protection when regional smoke is severe. It doesn't use vineyard lab results; instead, it measures county smoke exposure via NOAA's Hazard Mapping System.

If your county accumulates 13 or more "heavy smoke" days during the insurance period (June 1–Nov. 10), the policy triggers and pays according to schedule. Because FIP-SI is index-based, it doesn't measure block-level loss. It hedges county-wide risk and complements individual coverage for documented quality loss. Think of it as systemic-risk coverage for hazards that affect entire regions.

FIP-SI has expanded its coverage beyond California and is available for grapes in Idaho, Oregon and Washington beginning with the 2026 crop year.

WEST COAST SMOKE EXPOSURE TASK FORCE




The 2026 fire season brought dozens of qualifying smoke events to parts of Oregon and Washington. You can check the number of qualifying smoke days for your county at the USDA Risk Management Agency website.

WCSETF.ORG

## Smoke Exposure Resources

### Crop Insurance

- Smoke Claims Quick Reference Checklist
- Crop Insurance Detailed Guide
- Fire Insurance Protection - Smoke Index (FIP-SI)
- Check the FIP-SI Smoke Map
- Accredited Smoke Exposure Laboratories

### Industry Resources From the WCSETF

- Smoke FAQ
- Grape Sampling Protocol for Growers
- Micro-Ferment Protocol
- Nano-Scale Ferment Protocol

*The WCSETF newsletter, bulletins and website are supported by a grant from the American Vineyard Foundation, Oregon Wine Board and the Washington State Wine Commission.*

# 2026 Wildfire Season

The 2026 West Coast wildfire season was notably severe, particularly across Oregon and Washington.

Oregon experienced its largest wildfire season on record, while Washington weathered one of its most destructive seasons.

In California, wildfire activity also increased throughout the summer, with large fires burning across the state amid hot, dry conditions.




Smoke from dozens of large fires in Oregon. July 26, 2026.
Photo courtesy of NASA Earth Observatory/Michala Garrison.

## WASHINGTON

More than 15 large fires were burning in Washington by early September. The **Sinlahekin Fire** and **Kaiser Canyon Fire** in Okanogan County each burned more than 130,000 acres.

## OREGON

In a record-breaking wildfire season, more than 2.5 million acres burned in Oregon in 2026. The **Big Grass Fire**, Oregon's largest wildfire ever, burned more than 579,000 acres in the southeastern part of the state.

## CALIFORNIA

The **Timber Fire,** which burned in Big Sur, west of Monterey County wine country, grew to more than 25,000 acres by early September.

The **Plaskett Fire**, spanning southern Monterey County and northern San Luis Obispo County, quickly grew to 30,000 acres in September.

Calaveras County's **Gann Fire** burned more than 10,000 acres in early August.




Smoke streams across eastern Washington. August 2, 2026.
Photo courtesy of NASA Earth Observatory/Lauren Dauphin.

## Research Bulletin Update

The WCSETF has released Bulletin No. 3 and No. 4, part of its seven-part Research Bulletin series summarizing the Smoke Exposure Research Roadmap.

Bulletin No. 3 focuses on improving the understanding of smoke-marker compounds through developing databases and establishing a correlation between sensory thresholds in wines made from smoke-exposed grapes and smoke-marker compounds in grapes.

Bulletin No. 4 covers rapid detection and risk assessment of smoke-marker compounds in grapes and wine.

The new research bulletins have been posted on the WCSETF website, with additional reports coming in the future.

## Smoke Summit Recap

The 2026 Smoke Summit brought together researchers and industry experts to provide the winegrape community with the latest information on wildfire smoke impacts and smoke management.

Organized through the WCSETF, the Summit emphasized actionable guidance for growers and wineries heading into harvest, while highlighting ongoing research efforts.

Dr. Arran Rumbaugh, formerly a chemist with USDA-ARS's Crops Pathology and Genetics Research Unit and now with the UC Davis Cooperative Extension, has focused her research on establishing threshold levels of smoke compounds in grapes that lead to negative or altered sensory impacts in finished wines, ranging from overt ashy flavors to reduced fruit expression.

Data shows that early on, varied intensities of smoke exposure do result in different metabolic responses in grapes. If smoke has traveled some distance versus immediately impacting a vineyard, sensory outcomes may differ.

Dr. Torey Arvik's work at USDA-ARS explores innovative biological solutions for combatting smoke impact. One promising area involves bacterial genes capable of breaking down guaiacol, a key smoke-exposure compound, into less sensory-active molecules that are already naturally present in wine.

At Oregon State University, Dr. Cole Cerrato's research examines how specific smoke-derived compounds originate from the combustion of certain plant materials and interact with grapes. The type of vegetation burned can influence smoke composition.

Dr. Tom Collins at Washington State University shared findings on how wildfire smoke exposure affects grapes throughout the growing season. While earlier research suggested that the period shortly after veraison was the most vulnerable to smoke exposure, Dr. Collins' studies have shown that grapes remain susceptible throughout much of the growing season.

Dr. Elizabeth Tomasino of Oregon State University has found that grape variety plays a much larger role in baseline smoke compound levels than geographic origin. This reinforces the need for variety-specific benchmarks when evaluating smoke exposure.

For additional information and to learn more about research findings, visit the WCSETF website to watch a recording of the 2026 Smoke Summit.

*WCSETF is a coalition of industry leaders committed to providing timely communications, resources, and best practices to help winegrape growers and vintners navigate the challenges of wildfire smoke. The Task Force serves as a central hub for updates, education, and collaboration to support industry resilience and informed decision-making.*

SMOKE EXPOSURE

# Spotlight

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE

WEST COAST SMOKE EXPOSURE TASK FORCE



NOVEMBER 2026



CALIFORNIA

## Crop Insurance: Preparing For a Smoke Claim

Crop insurance plays a significant role in the recovery after a smoke exposure loss. For growers who carry crop insurance, it is important to keep in mind the specific steps necessary to process a smoke claim.

- Contact your agent to file a notice of possible loss **as soon as you have smoke** in your vineyard.
- Pull berries for lab testing **prior to harvest**. Testing is required for any variety or location the winery is rejecting, or accepting at a reduced value, due to smoke damage.
- **Keep your grapes separately identifiable.** Do not commingle your production with other blocks at any point, even if a winery is accepting your grapes conditionally pending test results. This applies through every stage, including after the grapes are processed into juice.
- **Get documented rejection from the winery.** Most carriers require an initial rejection letter on the winery's letterhead and at least two additional documented attempts to market the grapes elsewhere.
- **If rejected, get proof of destruction.** The winery must provide documentation that the juice was dumped or destroyed, and not used elsewhere.
- **Keep your own samples. Retain pre-harvest berry samples** for independent, third-party testing if needed. Ask your claims representative what they require for this.

## What is FIP-SI?

Offered for the first time in 2025 in California, FIP-SI is an area-wide endorsement you can stack on your Grape Crop Provisions policy for protection when regional smoke is severe. It doesn't use vineyard lab results; instead, it measures county smoke exposure via NOAA's Hazard Mapping System.

If your county accumulates 13 or more "heavy smoke" days during the insurance period (June 1–Nov. 10), the policy triggers and pays according to schedule. Because FIP-SI is index-based, it doesn't measure block-level loss. It hedges county-wide risk and complements individual coverage for documented quality loss. Think of it as systemic-risk coverage for hazards that affect entire regions.

FIP-SI has expanded its coverage beyond California and is available for grapes in Idaho, Oregon and Washington beginning with the 2026 crop year.

## Smoke Exposure Resources

### Crop Insurance

- Smoke Claims Quick Reference Checklist
- Crop Insurance Detailed Guide
- Fire Insurance Protection - Smoke Index (FIP-SI)
- Check the FIP-SI Smoke Map
- Accredited Smoke Exposure Laboratories

### Industry Resources From the WCSETF

- Smoke FAQ
- Grape Sampling Protocol for Growers
- Micro-Ferment Protocol
- Nano-Scale Ferment Protocol

*The WCSETF newsletter, bulletins and website are supported by a grant from the American Vineyard Foundation, Oregon Wine Board and the Washington State Wine Commission.*

WEST COAST SMOKE EXPOSURE TASK FORCE

WCSETF.ORG