Confined Spaces and CO2: The Deadliest Hazard in the Cellar

During fermentation, wine produces large amounts of carbon dioxide. CO2 is heavier than air, colorless and odorless, and it collects in tanks, pits, sumps and poorly ventilated cellar rooms. Workers who enter these spaces can lose consciousness within moments — and would-be rescuers often become victims too.

Why this matters for insurance

Confined-space incidents are among the most severe workers' compensation claims a winery can have, and they can lead to OSHA citations and lawsuits. Carriers ask about confined-space procedures when underwriting wineries.

Building a confined-space program

- Identify every confined space: tanks, pits, sumps, bins and enclosed rooms.
- Post warning signs at each entry point.
- Use fixed CO2 monitors in fermentation areas and portable meters for entry.
- Ventilate spaces before and during entry.
- Require entry permits, a trained attendant outside and a rescue plan.
- Never allow employees to enter a tank to rescue a coworker without proper equipment.
- Train every cellar worker every year, including seasonal harvest staff.

Tank cleaning alternatives

Use spray balls and external cleaning systems where possible to reduce the need for tank entry.

Seasonal workers

Harvest interns and temporary workers may be unfamiliar with CO2 hazards. Train them before their first shift and supervise closely.

Document everything

Keep written procedures, training records, permits and monitor calibration logs.

Fermentation is the magic of winemaking. Make sure it never becomes a tragedy.

Questions about your coverage? I've spent more than 46 years helping Kansas City area businesses and families get insurance right. As an independent agent with access to over 50 markets, I work for you — not an insurance company. Call or text Jay Stoetzer at 816-384-7738, or email jay@insure247.com for a no-pressure review.

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