



2026 Washington Wineries HR Compliance Guide

A quick, practical checklist of high-impact Washington updates and common pitfalls for wineries with seasonal staffing. Built for tasting rooms and production teams.

1) The \$80K Salary Cliff (Jan 1, 2026)

The Rule: To be exempt from overtime in WA, employees must earn \$80,168.40/year.

The Risk: Tasting Room Managers or Assistant Winemakers earning \$60k-\$75k may no longer be exempt. You must either raise salary or pay time-and-a-half for hours over 40.

2) The Spanish Safety Gap (L&I; Requirement)

The Rule: L&I; requires safety training (Heat Illness, Pesticides, Machinery) in a language the employee understands.

The Risk: Documenting training in English for a Spanish-speaking crew can be a major liability during an audit or injury claim.

3) 'Ban the Box' Expansion (July 1, 2026)

The Rule: Wineries with 15+ employees cannot ask about criminal history until after a conditional offer is made.

The Risk: Job postings that say 'Background check required' can trigger a \$5,000 tester lawsuit.

4) Driver's License Trap

The Rule: You cannot require a driver's license unless driving is an essential function of that specific role.

The Risk: Standard Tasting Room Associate templates often include this incorrectly, creating discrimination exposure.

Want a 30-day compliance plan for your winery?

Branchline Consulting helps Washington wineries create seasonal hiring packs, bilingual onboarding, clear procedures, and manager checklists - without drowning in jargon.

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Note: General guidance, not legal advice. Confirm requirements with qualified counsel and current WA guidance.