

This is Officer Matt Harvey with the California Highway Patrol for community comment.

Fire season in California is upon us and fire danger is above normal levels. Significantly dry conditions are present due to historically low precipitation and high temperatures. This year's fire season arrived 4 weeks early. There was less snow-pack melt resulting in vegetation drying out faster. Everything is in place for a devastating wildfire season. The only thing missing is a spark!

We each have the responsibility to prevent human-caused wildfires. The California Highway Patrol, in partnership with the US Forest Service, is urging all motorists to exercise extreme caution when traveling on Humboldt County's roadways.

Recently, the CHP has responded to multiple grass and brush fires along US-101, State Route 299, and State Route 36. These fires are often caused by vehicles emitting sparks, vehicles stopping within dry grassy areas, cigarettes, and similar fire hazards. In addition to these fires potentially spreading out of control, they can create traffic congestion, necessitate road closures, and affect motorists' travel plans.

Sparks from dragging chains, flat tires, and faulty spark arresters, along with heat from catalytic converters, mufflers, and engines are common causes of fires in Humboldt County. A disabled vehicle pulled off the side of the road in or near dry grasses may become the cause of a fire, endangering the passengers and equipment or surrounding area.

According to the US Forest Service, vehicles cause more wildfires in California than any other cause and yet they are among the easiest for people to prevent. Humboldt County is home to the largest population of redwood trees in the world, not to mention a vast array of wildlife and diverse waterways. Let's do our part to make sure our forests are protected.

You can help prevent these destructive fires by following some simple guidelines:

Be wheel safe – Check tire pressure. Driving on an exposed wheel rim throws sparks.

Be prepared – Carry a shovel and a fire extinguisher in your vehicle and Off-Highway Vehicle.

Follow all public-use restrictions and access closures – It is important to check with local agencies about any closures before venturing off road.

Keep vehicles off dry grass – Exhaust systems can heat up to 1,000 degrees and ignite adjacent grasses and shrubs.

Check your spark arrester – Before heading outdoors, clean your Off-Highway Vehicle's spark arrester. This will reduce the chance of a spark starting a wildfire.

Make sure nothing is dragging – Make sure vehicles are properly maintained with nothing dragging on the ground.

We can all make a difference in reducing human-caused fires during this season. Remember one less spark is one less wildfire.

While traveling this summer, be aware of wildfire conditions in your area or the area you plan to visit and take appropriate prevention measures. If you encounter a roadside fire, please notify law enforcement immediately by dialing 911. For additional information regarding roadside fires or any non-emergency, you can contact the California Highway Patrol at 1-800-TELL-CHP.

This has been Officer Matt Harvey with the California Highway Patrol for Community Comment.