

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

I arrived at my office yesterday to find two sleeping bags, tattered, soaking and kind of smelly, thrown over our back fence to hang unceremoniously over the artichokes in our flower bed. Last week it was some clothing which had been chucked into the enclosure. Before that we've found everything from grocery sacks to cigarette butts to used hypodermic needles. This is in the children's play area behind our church, mind you, so it was a matter of some concern.

While it is easy to blame the trash we see on the problem of homelessness, this only accounts for a small fraction of the litter piling up in Northern California.

According to a survey CalTrans released last summer, half of all drivers admit to littering along our state's highways. I'm going to stress the word ADMIT here, because I hope that at least a few would be ashamed of their poor behavior and wouldn't want everyone to know they were responsible for the pathetic state of roadside pollution.

When these results came out, CalTrans director Michael Dougherty said, "These findings are staggering because this is not accidental public behavior, but rather a conscious decision to improperly discard or leave behind debris along California freeways. These items create roadway hazards while also directly affecting the cleanliness of our highways and the waterways. When it rains, stormwater flushes highway debris and pollutants into the storm drain system flowing to open bodies of water."

That's right, the junk you toss out your window or let blow out of your car becomes part of the pollution which is poisoning our rivers and flowing out into Humboldt Bay and the other coastal waterways. That plastic bag you set free in the forest doesn't decompose into nutrients for the redwoods, you know. Neither, by the way, do the paper ones. Instead they create dangers to the wildlife and contribute to the uglification of our beautiful land. Yes, even those wads of paper, discarded butts, fast food wrappers and aluminum cans you leave behind work together to destroy all that is wonderful here.

Not only is litter responsible for the deaths of millions of birds, fish, and other animals each year, but humans are at risk too. Sure, your F-350 might be able to hit a ladder that fell off someone else's truck and survive without more than a little tire damage, but how about the driver of a smart car or a Prius? That same piece of debris could roll them over. Or when the RV driver or logging truck swerves to avoid that cardboard box which has blown into the roadway and clips

your car, sending you down the embankment for a rescue team to salvage after the crash?

Accidents caused by litter lead to injuries and death.

Last year California spent over seventy-six million dollars picking up your trash. Just last year's trash collected was enough to fill over ten thousand garbage trucks packed full. If you are having trouble picturing that, imagine a line of bumper-to-bumper trash trucks stretching more than 51 miles long.

How can you help? Well, for one, STOP LITTERING. It isn't that hard to get your trash into a proper receptacle. It's not hard to take an extra minute to secure your load or to make sure you didn't just leave the office Dutch Brother's order on the roof. You can do it! I know you can.

You could also volunteer to help out with the CalTrans Annual Anti-Litter Day. It's coming up on Thursday, April 20. We could help mend some of the damage we've done by getting out and filling a bag or two in the name of making where we live a better place.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort with today's KINS Community Comment.