

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

Sometimes at this time of year it seems as if all of northern California is on fire. During our record-setting rainy season there had been some comment that this would be a year with few wildfires. Sadly, that prediction was very, VERY wrong. Dozens of fires are burning through our region. Thousands of people have been evacuated from their homes. Hundreds of homes have been lost to the flames. Smoke has billowed out, covering us in ash and clogging lungs and eyes with a thick orange-grey haze.

This year Calfire has responded to 1100 more fires than they had last year at this time. Bigger ones too – almost double the average number of acres burned.

As of a week ago, California has experienced over six thousand fires in the areas covered by Calfire and the U.S. Forest Service. That equals more than half a million acres of land turned to ash.

My agency, The Salvation Army, is one of a few dozen major organizations to provide Emergency Disaster Services to those impacted by the fires and floods, earthquakes and hurricanes, tsunamis and other unexpected life-changing events. In addition to personnel on the ground in many areas where such events occur, we send trained response teams to affected areas as needed.

I have had the incredible but unwanted privilege of being part of those teams, and I can tell you that the main thing you see when you are on the front lines of a disaster are broken people. Our job is to try to help them put the pieces of themselves and their families back together so that they can begin to build a new life out of the ashes of the old.

As much as I love being a part of that kind of recovery, I hate that anyone ever needs to go through that.

That's why I hate fires most of all. It's not the number of fires or the acres destroyed or the people displaced, injured, or killed, though those are all tragic and affecting. Instead it's because most fires which come and wreak such devastation are unnecessary. They should never have happened at all.

The ugliest statistic about wildfires in California is that almost none of them are really "wild". Most of them are our fault. I know – it's hard to believe and even harder to think about, but the cold, hard, ugly truth about wildfires in California is that 95 percent of them are caused

by people. All that death, loss and destruction could have been prevented by each person taking just a little tiny bit more care.

It's not just putting out campfires carefully or making sure burn barrels are properly covered and only used in the proper environment either. Tractors, mowers, and even weed trimmers can strike sparks if used improperly, or even if used properly, but at the wrong time of day or in poor wind conditions. Sparks from a dragging tow chain or a flat tire or heat from the engine or undercarriage of a car are also common causes.

Please, take care out there. Don't make me go to more fires. Keep people happy and healthy in their homes. And keep the smoke out of our eyes. Are you with me?

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort for the KINS Community Comment.