October 2023 Creation Care Green Tips

**What Do Mega-Wildfires Worldwide Tell Us About the Climate Crisis?**

1.  Scientists at NOAA tell us that Earth had its hottest July in 174 years, and that the last eight years (since 2016) have produced the eight hottest Julys.  Record-breaking heat and weather extremes are driving the wildfires that have ravaged **37 million acres** across nearly every Canadian province and territory, large areas of the Western U.S., Maui, Greece, and other places around the world.  According to a 2021 study in the UK, wildfires expose about **44 million** people per year worldwide to toxic air, causing about **667,000 deaths annually**, with almost **39% of them children.**Wildfires are consuming three times more of the U.S. and Canada than in the 1980s, and will progressively worsen until the world significantly reduces **greenhouse gas emissions,** according to U of Pennsylvania climate scientist Michael Mann, with an expectation of big increases in smoke exposure and reduction in air quality directly attributable to increase in fire activity.  Our leaders need to hear from all of us pushing them to do what they know needs to be done in order to achieve a livable planet.

2.  While North American wildfires are a natural occurrence, **climate change** is increasing their size and severity, and lengthening the duration of the fire season.  In addition to the devastating deaths of both human and animal life, towns, homes, and forests are turned into smoldering ruins, with immense financial costs of **preparing for fires, putting them out, and rebuilding in their wake.**Research at the Union of Concerned Scientists, using *climate source attribution* analysis that ties events or trends to their root causes, points to the industries that **are responsible for 37% (20 million acres) of the total area burned by forest fires in the Western U.S. and SW Canada** since the mid-1980s ([www.ucuusa.org/resources/fossil-fuels-behind-forest-fires](http://www.ucuusa.org/resources/fossil-fuels-behind-forest-fires)).  Yet it is the general public and communities affected by wildfires who have been forced to pay the price for inaction on climate change.  Alongside efforts to minimize wildfire risk and build resilience, we need policy makers to make drastic cuts in fossil fuel emissions, and to implement clean energy alternatives.

3. From 1983 to 1987, when the National Interagency Fire Center began keeping statistics, wildfires in the U.S. on average burned about **3,300 square miles annually,** compared with the  **12,000 square miles** that now burn yearly.  Numerous studies have linked human-caused climate change to the increases in North American fires and the extreme weather, especially drought, that is caused by the global warming that allows the jet stream of air high above the ground to meander and get stuck.  The prolonged bouts of fires have led to big **increases in smoke exposure and reduction in air quality**, with increasing threats to health that affect people's lives, livelihoods and communities.  Scientists around the world warn that life on Earth will become unsustainable if nothing is done about the climate crisis - and that means each of us has a responsibility to be an advocate for the changes that are needed.

4.  Scientists in the U.S., the U.K., the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the European weather service Copernicus, and elsewhere all agree that the Northern Hemisphere suffered through its**hottest summer ever recorded**since the mid-1800s.  As the planet heats up, no place is protected from disasters, such as the unprecedented fires in Hawaii that reveal **the drying out of its landscape from the higher temperatures** that prevent La Ninas  (the weather pattern that has usually led to significant rainfall) from delivering adequate precipitation since the 1980s. Higher temperatures, drought and changes in rain patterns stress trees, creating perfect conditions for fires, which are often started by human activity.  **Choose to add your voice** to the millions of voices needed to urge governments around the world to take climate change seriously.