Standing in line at the checkout, the customer hears a person paying the cashier say that the Hereford post office has gone up in flames.

When that person tells a neighbor, the story at the checkout counter is expanded to include structure fires on the east side of Highway 92, with most of the homes all the way to Moson Road completely destroyed.

When the neighbor tells a friend the story, the wildfire has spread east to the San Pedro River and there isn’t anything left but ashes where once subdivisions stood.

When the friend goes to the store, the checkout clerk has a new story to relate to other customers.

The Monument Fire has offered evidence of many admirable qualities in our community.
The sincere generosity and immediate willingness to volunteer or offer assistance to anyone in need is a testament to our collective spirit.

This area has many people anxious to help firefighters, ready to donate to shelters and willing to surrender what they can offer to assist those in need.

Unfortunately, the panic created Thursday when the Monument Fire jumped Highway 92 and raced to the east between Hereford Road and Three Canyon Road is a poor reflection on our otherwise impressive community character.

That panic was in large part created by a consistent, continuous flow of rumor and misinformation.

One woman in the Canyon De Flores area reported receiving a telephone call ordering her to evacuate immediately.

Without considering the authenticity of the call, the woman quickly loaded her car, before checking with her neighbors, who had not received a similar notice.

The phone call turned out to be a prank, leaving the woman frustrated after she dealt with the stress.

Criticism has been levied at the emergency officials who are coordinating the firefighting effort. Similar criticism has been directed at the media, including this newspaper, for failing to correlate some of the reports that have been circulated in the community during this event.

Yet, some of the reports that are being aired in checkout lines, around company water coolers, and at other gatherings, simply are not true.

Here’s a simple rule that we, as a community, would do well to adhere to beginning immediately.

If you don’t know it to be true, don’t repeat it as if it were fact, and don’t believe what you hear unless you get that information from a reliable source.

There are lots of reliable sources, including this newspaper, other newspapers serving the region, radio and television stations.

For now, it’s more important to listen first, and save the gossip for later.

Otherwise, we will be victimized by the panic we create.

If you find a correction for this story, please contact our editorial department [1]