

Youth Firesetter Handbook For School Personnel



Glendale Fire Department

Glendale Fire Department Youth Firesetter Intervention Program

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Mission Statement

Glendale Fire Department Youth Firesetter Intervention Program

The mission of the Glendale Fire Department Youth Firesetter Intervention Program is to provide educational intervention to youth and their families experiencing problems with firesetting.



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Preface

Why are Firesetters Dangerous?

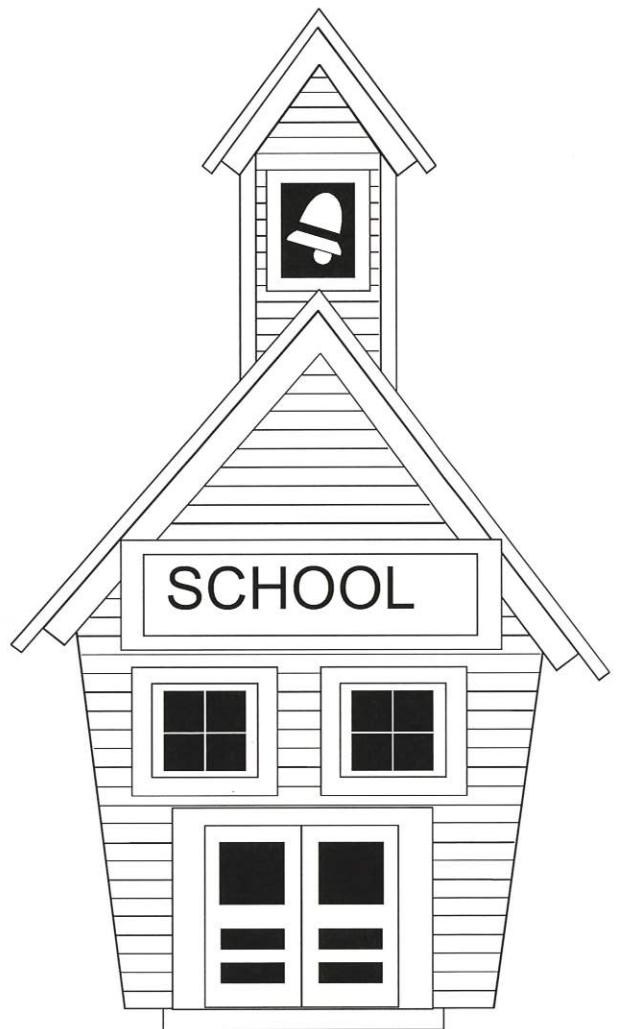
In one year fires set by juveniles accounted for more than 65,000 fires that caused 284 civilian deaths and 2,158 civilian injuries, according to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). These figures are said to be conservative due to the possible numbers of fires that went unreported during that year. According to the Uniform Crime Report, in 1999, 52% of all arson arrests nationwide were of juveniles. In 2002, there were an estimated 14,300 fires in elementary, middle and high schools in the United States according to a 2004 report from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA states these fires caused \$103.6 million in property damage and 122 injuries.

The danger of fire in today is greater than ever because of the high number of petroleum-based building materials and flammable liquids. Fires burn quicker and hotter and the smoke is more toxic than in the past because of these materials. A firesetter in an apartment complex or school can be likened to a serial sniper. Fire doubles in size every thirty seconds and consumes everything in its path, not unlike the serial sniper who kills those he/she comes in contact with, regardless of age, sex, ethnicity or socio-economic status.



School Fires

How to Make the Referral



What to do if a Child Brings Matches or Lighters to School or Sets a School Fire

- Follow school policy and procedures and the state laws regarding school fires
- Do not just chalk it up to kids being kids, this child may be sending a message that he/she needs help
- As part of your school discipline policy, incorporate mandatory attendance at a youth firesetter class offered by your local fire department
- If your school has counselors or social workers, notify the counselor or social worker of the firesetting incident and have him/her work with the child to find out why the child set the fire
- Contact your local fire or police department and notify them of the fire incident, even if the fire was small and was put out by school personnel. This child is in need of assistance. Please call your local fire department
- Notify the child's parent or guardian of the incident and the referral to a youth firesetter program

How to Make the Referral

Step I: If the fire has not been completely extinguished contact 9-1-1 immediately!

Step II: Contact your local fire department as soon after the fire incident as possible.

Glendale Fire Department 623-930-4483

Have the child's biographical information available including child's name, parent/guardian name, address and telephone number, child's age and birth-date, if child has been diagnosed with ADD/ADHD or other disorder, what was used to start the fire, when and where the fire took place, how much damage occurred due to the fire and if there were any injuries.

Step III: The school administrator should decide if prosecution of the student is desired. In the State of Arizona a child can be referred to the juvenile court at age 8. If prosecution is desired, a fire investigator or police officer will need to be called to the school for disposition of the report and juvenile court referral.

Step IV: If no prosecution is desired, a referral to your local fire department's youth firesetter intervention program is recommended. Through the program the child will receive fire safety education, information on the legal consequences of firesetting, information on the laws regarding firesetting, how firesetting impacts the community, how to make better choices regarding the use of fire, and the dangerous properties of fire. Counseling for the child and his or her family may also help the family with the firesetting issue.

Youth Firesetter Intervention Program School Referral Form
Fax Completed Form to Glendale Fire Department 623-847-5313

Date: _____

Referring School: _____ School District: _____

Contact Person: _____ Phone # _____ Fax # _____

Child's Name: _____

DOB: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____ Grade in School: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Relationship: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone (H): _____ (W): _____ (Message): _____

Does Child Have A.D.D., A.D.H.D. or other mental health diagnosis ? _____

Was Parent/Guardian Notified ? _____ By Whom ? _____ When ? _____

Was The School Counselor/Intervention Specialist Notified ? _____ When ? _____

Was the School Resource Officer (SRO) Notified ? _____ Is There a SRO ? _____

What Type of School Discipline Will the Child Receive ? _____

Is Mandatory attendance At a Firesetter Class Part of That Discipline ? _____

Fire Incident Information

What Was Used To Start the Fire? (Matches, Lighter, etc.) _____

How Did the Child Obtain These Items? _____

Location of Incident: _____ Date _____ Incident# _____

Was Child Alone or With Others in Fire Incident ? _____

Were The Others Referred to the Firesetter Program ? _____

How Was the Incident Brought To Attention of School ? _____

Signature of School Official Making Referral: _____

I am the Parent/Guardian of _____ and I Give Permission For

_____ School to Release This Information to the Glendale Fire Department,

for enrolling my child in the Firesetter Educational Program. (Parent's Signature)

_____ Date _____

Please write a brief synopsis of the firesetting event

School Fire Information

Since 2005, Phoenix area Fire Department Youth Firesetter Intervention Programs have received over 500 youth firesetter referrals from schools for fire misuse on or near school campuses. These referrals included the following situations:

- ❑ Using matches, lighters, a heated light bulb or a magnifying glass to light toilet paper or other combustibles on fire in the school bathroom, classroom or playground.
- ❑ Lighting firecrackers, smoke bombs or other firework type of devices on school property.
- ❑ Lighting paper or other products on fire in a trashcan or dumpster on or near the school campus.
- ❑ Lighting warming fires at a school bus stop.
- ❑ Using chemicals such as pool acid or other chemicals to cause a fire in a science classroom or on other school property.
- ❑ Using a spray can and a lighter to make a fire torch on or near school property.
- ❑ Setting off a fueled rocket on the school playground during recess.
- ❑ Flicking lit matches across the classroom or into another student's hair causing minor burns.
- ❑ Placing paper on the overhead projector light bulb until the heat caused the paper to catch on fire.
- ❑ Igniting lighters during a class movie.
- ❑ Setting off the school fire alarm when there was no fire
- ❑ Bringing assignments or schoolbooks to school with burned pages or edges.
- ❑ Making, possessing, and/or activating any kind of bomb-like device on or near a school campus.



Glendale Fire Department

Youth Firesetter Intervention Program

Since 1980, Phoenix area fire departments have been offering services to youth and their families experiencing issues with fire curiosity, experimentation and firesetting.

The Youth Firesetter Intervention Program has three program sections:

- ❑ Free educational classes
- ❑ Free parent groups
- ❑ Counseling referrals

Educational Classes:

- ❑ Education classes are taught on an as needed basis. Once a youth firesetter has been identified a class will be scheduled as soon as possible for the child or children.
- ❑ All curriculums taught are based on the age of the child
- ❑ All classes are taught by fire department personnel.
- ❑ Lessons include; fire safety, consequences, choices, responsibility, arson laws, how community resources are used in a fire, and the properties of fire.
- ❑ All classes are free of charge



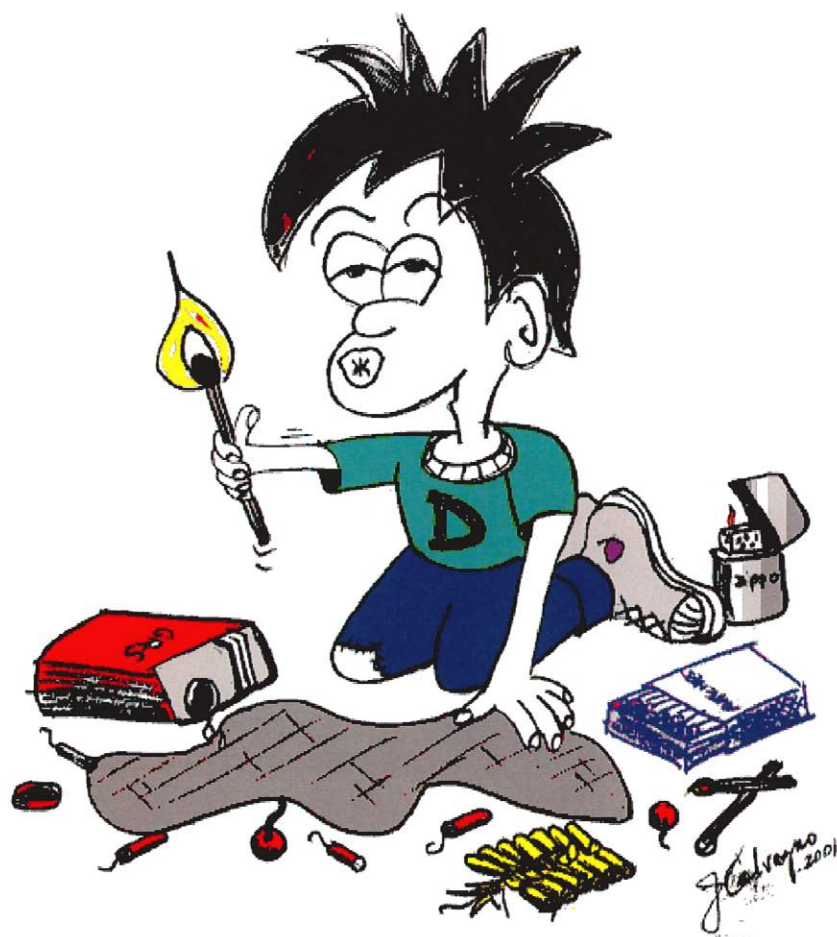
Parent/Caregiver Groups:

- ❑ A parent/caregiver group meets during the child's educational class.
- ❑ The parent/caregiver group is facilitated by a mental health provider.
- ❑ The discussion topics include; fire safety, parenting tips, arson laws, ADD/ADHD and firesetting and consequences.

Risk Assessment services:

- ❑ Each child aged 7 and above is given a Youth Firesetting Risk Assessment when he/she attend class. If the child score indicates that he/she is a definite or extreme risk, the child and family will be referred to a mental health professional at the family's expense.

Fire and Firesetters



Fire, What It Is and Why It Is So Fascinating

Fire defined: According to Webster's New World Dictionary, "fire is the active principle of burning, characterized by the heat and light of combustion" (1988).

Fire Triangle: There must be 3 combining sources for fire to occur (uninterrupted chain reaction);

1. There must be a source of oxygen (oxidizing agent). Approximately 16% oxygen is required for fire. Normal air contains 21% oxygen.
2. There must be a source of heat to reach ignition temperature, such as;
 - a. Open flame
 - b. The sun
 - c. Electrical energy
 - d. Sparks
 - e. Compressed gases
 - f. Arcs
 - g. Lightening
 - h. Friction
 - i. Chemical reaction
3. There must be a source of fuel such as:
 - a. Gases: natural gas, propane, butane, hydrogen, etc.
 - b. Liquids: gasoline, kerosene alcohol, paints, etc.
 - c. Solids: wood, paper, hay, dried plants, synthetics, plastics, cloth, etc.



Uses of Fire: Fire is a very important part of our daily lives. We use fire for cooking, heating, transportation, celebrations, holiday ceremonies and in industry and technology. Along with these proper uses of fire, also come fire abuses. Many of these fire "abuses" result in property loss, injury, and death. Unfortunately, youth firesetters are responsible for a large number of these fire abuses, especially on school campuses. So what is a youth firesetter?

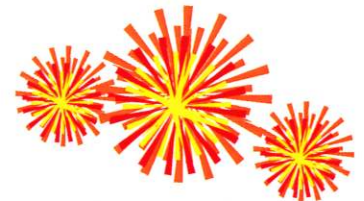
Youth Firesetter: A youth firesetter is a child under the age of 18 who accidentally or purposely starts a fire.

Abuse: To use wrongly, misuse.

Reasons for Firesetting

So why do these youth set fires? Why do they find fire so fascinating? The answer to these questions can be found in the history and celebrations of fire, stages of child development and categories of youth firesetters.



- ❑ A child is celebrating his first birthday. There are balloons, presents, relatives and a birthday cake right in front of the child. His mother leans over and lights a match to a large candle in the shape of a number one. Everyone is smiling and singing “Happy Birthday” and then the child is told to blow the candle out.
- ❑ The family goes on a camping trip. During the day the family gathers plenty of firewood for the nightly campfire. At night the family builds a campfire so they can roast marshmallows, stay warm and tell stories by the glow of the fire.
- ❑ In science class different experiments show how different colored flames are created by burning different types of materials and how a combination of certain chemicals can cause an explosion.
- ❑ It is the weekend and time for the weekly family barbecue. The charcoal or gas grill is heated in preparation for the cooking of the chicken, hamburgers, hot dogs and corn on the cob.
- ❑ It has been a stressful week at work and a mother prepares a relaxing bath with candles, bubbles and hot water.
- ❑ It is July 4th, and there are numerous firework celebrations throughout the community. This pyrotechnical extravaganza sets the sky on fire.
- ❑ In the winter- time a family uses a wood burning stove and a fireplace for warmth because they cannot afford electricity.
- ❑ A child sits down to watch his favorite television stunt show, the scene depicts a stuntman setting himself ablaze and then skateboarding over three parked cars.



All of these scenes depict how our society uses fire for celebrations, warmth, cooking, relaxation and entertainment. However to a child who is growing, developing, and learning, these uses of fire may be misinterpreted as being safe when without supervision they can be very dangerous. A child may not understand the dangers of fire or may not have been taught fire safety. As children grow and develop they understand things in very simple ways. Concepts like danger, what is real and not real and their own invincibility are not easily understood. It is important to understand how children learn and develop when looking at the motivation behind a child's firesetting.

Categories of Youth Firesetters

Other than normal developmental stages of fire curiosity a child goes through as he/she learns and develops, there are children who either accidentally or purposely set fires. These children can be categorized into five areas of firesetting behavior:

- ❑ **Curiosity Firesetter:** The curiosity firesetter is a child who is curious about fire and has not been taught fire safety. He/she may experiment with lighters, matches, candles, stoves, magnifying glasses, pilot lights, etc. to see how the device works and what fire does. Their motivation lies in how does fire work. Their intent is not to start a large fire or destroy property but rather to see how lighters and matches work and how fire behaves. 
- ❑ **Crisis Firesetter:** The crisis firesetter has experienced a recent crisis, trauma or upsetting experience in their life. They are attempting to communicate that they are frustrated and hurting. The firesetting is a behavioral manifestation of emotions and feelings of distress. Family conflict, divorce, a death of a significant person, problems at school and physical or sexual abuse are a few examples of the crisis these children may be experiencing.
- ❑ **Thrill-seeking Firesetter:** The thrill-seeking firesetter may set fires to impress others, on a dare, or to get out of school. He/she may use fireworks illegally. Peer pressure, boredom, thrill-seeking, and oppositional/defiant attitudes toward authority are contributing factors. 
- ❑ **Strategic Firesetter:** The strategic firesetter sets fires deliberately to gain acceptance by a group or gang, to threaten and intimidate others or to cover up some type of crime. The motivation is with complete disregard for others health or welfare.
- ❑ **Pathological Firesetter:** The pathological firesetter may have a long history of firesetting. These children may have severe psychological or psychiatric problems, neurological deficits, or have suffered severe long-term physical or sexual abuse. Many times fire is their best friend. These children require immediate therapeutic and possibly judicial intervention.

Regardless of the age of the child or the reason for the fire curiosity, fire experimentation or firesetting, the inappropriate use of fire is very serious behavior that cannot be ignored. If there is no intervention it is very likely the firesetting will continue and even escalate. Serious fire damage, injury or death could occur because of the firesetting behavior.

ADD/ADHD and Youth Firesetting

Data from the Glendale Fire Department shows that 15% to 25% of all children referred to the Youth Firesetter Program have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, ADD/ADHD affects 3-5% of all children in the United States. The National Institute of Mental Health has identified the following three characteristics of ADD/ADHD:

1. Inattention: Children may have difficulty focusing on one task for any length of time. They live in the moment and often forget directions or rules given a short time ago. Playing with matches, lighters or candles may result in the child walking away from burning or smoldering objects they have just ignited.
2. Impulsivity: Children act quickly without thinking of the possible consequences of their behavior. They tend to act immediately when encountering interesting objects such as matches or lighters. The sense of adventure and excitement is very high in these children and contributes to the high risk of burn injury.
3. Hyperactivity: These children may exhibit a high activity or energy level. The high energy level coupled with a strong curiosity can lead to fire experimentation especially when parental supervision is lacking.

A diagnosis of ADD/ADHD requires a trained clinician with expertise in childhood disorders to thoroughly test and evaluate the child. The clinician, parent and teacher should develop intervention and treatment plans to afford this child the most opportunity for success. Monitoring and reevaluating should be on a continuous basis.

Children rely on parents and caregivers for nurturing, security, acceptance and stability. When conflicts, distress, substance abuse, instability, illness or death occur in the home children become unsettled, scared, angry, depressed or sad and attempt to resolve the issues in their own mind without having learned appropriate coping or problem solving skills. One way children attempt to cope and express their emotions is by setting a fire. The child's firesetting places the family and neighborhood in extreme danger.



Myths and Facts about Youth Firesetting

Myth: It is normal for children to play with fire.

Fact: It is not normal for children to play with fire. Fire curiosity is common, but the use of fire without a parent's knowledge or supervision is extremely dangerous.

Myth: Firesetting is a phase most children go through and will outgrow.

Fact: Firesetting is not a phase. If there is not some type of fire safety education or other intervention, the firesetting can easily get out of control and damage, injure or kill.

Myth: A child can control a small fire.

Fact: All fires start small and can quickly become uncontrollable. Fire can double in size every thirty seconds. It just takes one strike of a match or flick of a lighter.



Myth: All children who set fires do it because they are angry and want to hurt someone or something.

Fact: The largest group of youth firesetters are children who are curious about fire or want to experiment with fire not children who are angry or destructive.

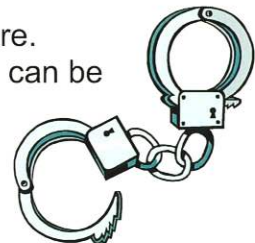
Myth: A child as young as 2 cannot learn fire safety.

Fact: Two year olds can learn fire safety skills such as; "Stop, drop, cover the face and roll," "Crawl low under smoke," and the difference between tools and toys.



Myth: A child 8 years of age cannot be arrested for setting a fire.

Fact: According to Arizona State Law, children as young as 8 can be arrested for setting a fire.



Arizona, School and Fire Reporting Laws



The Law as it Relates to Fire

Arizona Revised Statutes

The law in the state of Arizona is very specific as it relates to fireworks, reckless burning and arson, regardless of where the offense occurs. One thought to consider is that a child can be arrested in Arizona starting at age 8 for setting a fire even if he /she did not mean for the fire to damage anything or get out of control. **Intent is not a prerequisite** to the crime of reckless burning or arson.

- **Arizona Revised Statute 36-1602.A Fireworks prohibited**
Except as otherwise provided by this article, it is unlawful to sell, offer or expose for sale, use, explode or possess any fireworks. **Fireworks prohibited is a Class 1 misdemeanor**
- **Arizona Revised Statute 13-1702.A Reckless burning; classification**
A person commits reckless burning by recklessly causing a fire or explosion which results in damage to an occupied structure, a structure, wildland or property. **Reckless burning is a Class 1 misdemeanor**
- **Arizona Revised Statute 13-1703.A Arson of a structure or property; classification**
A person commits arson of a structure or property by knowingly and unlawfully damaging a structure or property by knowingly causing a fire or explosion. **Arson of a structure is a class 4 felony. Arson of a property is a class 4 felony if valued at more than \$1,000.00**
- **Arizona Revised Statute 13-1704.A Arson of an occupied structure; classification**
A person commits arson of an occupied structure by knowingly and unlawfully damaging an occupied structure by causing a fire or explosion. **Arson of an occupied structure is a class 2 felony**

Other Laws

- **Arizona Revised Statute 13-2907.A False reporting; classification**
A person commits false reporting by initiating or circulating a report of a bombing, fire, offense or other emergency knowing that such report is false and intending:
 1. That it will cause action of any sort by an official or volunteer agency organized to deal with emergencies; or
 2. That it will place a person in fear of imminent serious physical injury; or
 3. That it will prevent or interrupt the occupation of any building, room, place of assembly, public place or means of transportation.**False reporting is a class 1 misdemeanor**

School Law

- **Arizona Revised Statute 13-2911.A.1.2 Interference or disruption of an educational institution**

A person commits interference with or disruption of an educational institution by doing any of the following:

2. Intentionally or knowingly going on or remaining on the property of any educational institution for the purpose of interfering with or disrupting the lawful use of the property or in any manner as to deny or interfere with the lawful use of the property by others.

Interference or disruption of an educational institution is a class 1 misdemeanor

- **Arizona Education Code (2000) 15-841.H.1-4 Responsibilities of pupils; alternative education programs; community service; placement review committee**

A school district or charter school shall expel from school for at least one year a pupil who is determined to have threatened an educational institution as defined in 13-2911(interference or disruption of an educational institution), except that the school district or charter school may modify this expulsion requirement for a pupil on a case by case basis if the pupil participates in mediation, community service, restitution or other programs in which the pupil takes responsibility for the results of the threat. This subsection shall be construed consistently with the requirements of the individuals with disabilities education act (20 United States Code §§ 1400 through 1420). A school district may reassign a pupil who is subject to expulsion pursuant to this subsection to an alternative education program pursuant to subsection E of this section if the pupil participates in mediation, community service, restitution or other programs in which the pupil takes responsibility for the threat. A school district or charter school may require a pupil's parent or guardian to participate in mediation, community service, restitution or other programs in which the parent or guardian takes responsibility with the pupil for the threat. For the purposes of this subsection, "threatened an educational institution" means to interfere with or disrupt an educational institution by doing any of the following:

1. For the purpose of causing, or in reckless disregard of causing, interference with or disruption of an educational institution, threatening to cause physical injury to any employee of an educational institution or any person attending an educational institution.
2. For the purpose of causing, or in reckless disregard of causing, interference with or disruption of an educational institution, threatening to cause damage to any educational institution, the property of any educational institution, the property of any employee of an educational institution or the property of any person attending an educational institution.
3. Going on or remaining on the property of any educational institution for the purpose of interfering with or disrupting the lawful use of the property or in any manner as to deny or interfere with the lawful use of the property by others.
4. Refusing to obey a lawful order to leave the property of an educational institution.

Reporting of School Fires: The Laws

Fire Code – Adopted by the Arizona State Fire Marshal's Office

Division III - Fire Reporting

Reporting of Fires

Sec. 11.301. In the event a fire occurs or the discovery of a fire, smoke or unauthorized release of flammable or toxic materials on any property, the owner or occupant shall immediately report such condition to the fire department. A fire shall mean any fire not used for cooking, heating or recreational purposes or one not incidental to the normal operations of the property.



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