



Firewise Communities®



"The How-To Newsletter"

This quarterly provides articles and helpful hints on how to incorporate Firewise principles.

Summer 2009



Featured Articles

- Firewise Community Example – Taylor, Florida
- Maine's First Firewise Community
- The One, Two, Three of Firewise Landscaping
- Motivating Seasonal Residents
(and much more.....)

Share a Helpful Hint!

Do you have a helpful hint or article you would like to share with others? Send it to Firewise Communities, 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169

THE FIREWISE COMMUNITY

Getting the Word Out

Summer is high season when it comes to wildfires; all the more reason to be sure you have as many tools at your disposal for communicating important information to members of your community about how to keep their property safe. After all, communication is key and, fortunately, there is a broad range of tools available for getting the word out.

Most of us are familiar with the more traditional modes of communicating – word of mouth, flyers, group meetings, or community activities have all served Firewise communities well. So have newsletters and stories in local media. But modern technology adds some new tools that may be worth exploring. These include the more familiar e-mail and websites that most computer users rely on to have information at their fingertips. These electronic media are just the cornerstone, though. With the introduction of interactive websites such as *Facebook*® and *MySpace*® there has been an explosion of on-line tools that can enhance outreach within and between communities.

For example, *Twitter*® (<http://www.twitter.com>) allows its members to report day-to-day and even moment-to-moment information to a targeted audience. Wildfire specialists in a number of states use Twitter to provide updates on fire threats and actual fires during fire season, and to offer fire prevention tips at other times of the year. The free web service offers a quick, immediate way to get the word out. There also is *MyFirewise*® (<http://network.firewise.org>), a Facebook-like site geared to individuals who live in communities where wildfire poses a risk, offering opportunities to share experiences and strategies that have helped make Firewise communities safer. (See the spring issue of How-To for advice on how to get started with *MyFirewise*.)

And then there is "word of thumb," or texting – making use of your cell phone, Blackberry®, or I-Phone® in a manner that combines e-mail, computer, and phone like no other medium can. Ultimately, whether you Twitter, network on *MyFirewise*, e-mail, text, or use old-fashioned printed flyers or face-to-face interactions, you'll be reaching your community members and helping them to be informed about Firewise principles that can make their homes and your overall community safer in the event of a wildfire. The key to your success is in selecting the communication tools that work best for effectively getting the word out to your community members.

THE FIREWISE COMMUNITY — EXAMPLE

TAYLOR, FLORIDA — AN OLD-FASHIONED, BUT EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS

Taylor, Florida is a small, unincorporated community located in Baker County, in North Central Florida. Surrounded by federal, state, and private industrial forest lands, Taylor is relatively isolated, though Jacksonville is within 45 miles. Since the Civil War, the area



A State Division of Forestry ranger works the chipper/shredder during Taylor's January 2009 Clean-up Day.

has been home to many generations of the Taylor family, though recently the community has seen an influx of new residents from Jacksonville and elsewhere. "We have about 400 homes in the middle of the woods," says Nancy Oliver, chair of Taylor's Firewise community and captain of the local volunteer fire department. Oliver isn't kidding. Taylor's land area of 1,700 acres is set within the 374,528 acres of Baker County, about 92% of which is forested. The community is flanked by the Osceola National Forest to the southwest, the John Bethea State Forest to the north and east, and Rayonier industrial timberland to the Southeast.

"With increasing regularity, private industrial forests in this area are being sold to real estate developers and public land management agencies," notes Oliver. Wildfire is a tangible aspect of life in Taylor. Over the past 10 years, three major fires of between 4,800 and 60,000 acres have threatened the

community, although no major structural damage has occurred. What's more, managers in abutting federal, state, and industrial forest rely heavily on prescribed burning as a management tool, making escaped controlled burns a potential danger. In fact, one of the large fires that recently impacted Taylor derived from this activity, although other sources of fire threat include lightning strikes, escaped trash burning, and arson. For the most part, wildfire occurrence tends to be cyclical, coinciding with drought. Community members report that lack of precipitation has been an issue in Taylor recently.

"We're not a typical Firewise community," says Oliver. "We don't have a homeowner's association, paved roads, or street signs. It's rural and, until recently, most residents were descendants of families that had been here for generations. They were used to fire being a threat and had an attitude of 'we know all about this.'"

To get the Firewise message out, an annual Fire Prevention Day is offered, featuring participation from the USDA Forest Service, State Division of Forestry, and local County Fire Department. The event is held at the local fire department as an all-day open house featuring displays of fire prevention literature and fire history of the area, as well as fun freebies for



USFS and local Baker County firefighters clean up around a disabled resident's home during the January 2009 Clean-up Day.

community members to take with them. A yearly Clean-up Day also is offered to homeowners who sign up

in advance. Homeowners receive help cleaning up vegetation around their homes along with suggestions about additional ways they can make their homes Firewise.

During its past two Fire Prevention Days, local residents have been encouraged to use the day as a community-wide yard sale where they also can set up a table to sell their "stuff." "It gets bigger every year, allowing us to get the word out to more and more



Taylor residents at a safety briefing meeting.

people," notes Oliver. "Since our community members are older and many do not use the Internet, we also use the local newspapers to promote the Firewise message, offering informational articles as well as announcements about Firewise events. And we put up posters and flyers at local stores to advertise events, along with old-fashioned door hangers."

Through grant money and donations from the USFS and Department of Forestry, Taylor's Firewise team has also provided residents Smokey Bear litter bags stuffed with an introductory letter, Firewise and fire prevention literature, and a few "goodies" such as a Smokey Bear key chain or other novelty items.

How-To Newsletter thanks Nancy Oliver, chair of the Taylor Firewise Community and captain of the volunteer fire department, for the information and photographs provided for this Community Example.)

THE FIREWISE COMMUNITY — EXAMPLE *(continued)*

WATERBORO, MAINE – LAKE ARROWHEAD COMMUNITY

In 2008, Waterboro's Lake Arrowhead Community became Maine's first Firewise Communities/USA site through a collaborative effort between the Maine Forest Service, the Waterboro Fire Department and a private development called Lake Arrowhead Community (LAC). The rural community, 32 miles southwest of Portland, is located along the Little Ossipee River and the Lake Arrowhead shoreline, with much of the community overshadowed by white pines and other flammable softwoods.



Volunteers from the Waterboro Fire Department, the Maine Forest Service and the Lake Arrowhead Community's Public Works Department worked together to chip over 53 tons of brush.

While the population of LAC is approximately 2,500, the Maine Forest Service chose a small section of Waterboro – with approximately 400 residents – to start the Firewise community. "The thought was to not bite off more than we could chew," says Kent Nelson, Maine Forest Service fire prevention specialist. In August of 2008, all three groups worked together and held LAC's first brush-chipping day, which attracted participation from more than 20 homeowners.

Since success breeds success, another brush chipping day was planned for 2009, this time in May rather than August, due to the increase in downed softwood branches resulting from a December 2008 ice storm. The excessive amount of brush and limbs on the forest floor caused concern and increased interest in the Firewise brush-chipping event. Interest was

further encouraged by information posted on three websites (town, fire department, and LAC), along with information on the local access cable TV channel. By the time they held the brush-chipping day, the Waterboro Fire Department had tallied more than 100 applications for chipping, requiring an expansion of the event from one day to more than three. Volunteers from the Waterboro Fire Department, LAC Public Works, and the Maine Forest Service worked together to chip over 53 tons of wood chips.

The success of the brush-chipping days has led the community members to expand the size of their Firewise community to include all of LAC located within Waterboro (approximately 1,500 residents). This would increase their per-capita Firewise project commitment from \$800 to \$3000 annually. But that's not all. Since LAC became Firewise, several other positive changes have occurred within the community.

For example, an outdated tree-cutting ordinance was updated to allow residents to clear trees within 30 feet of their home, as is recommended when employing Firewise principles to create defensible space. Previously, in order to retain the wooded character of the community, a tree-cutting permit was required prior to cutting and a tree could only be approved for cutting if it was within 20 feet of the home. Additionally, the Maine Forest Service has developed a positive relationship with the Saco River Corridor Commission, which regulates tree cutting within the shoreland zone and has now been educated on Firewise concepts — offering to consider them when making decisions about tree-cutting requests.

Finally, many of Waterboro's residents have been educated on how to reduce the risk of wildfire near their homes; hundreds of Firewise brochures have been distributed at the fire station, the LAC clubhouse, and the annual



In 2008, a Firewise Booth was set up at the Waterboro "Old Home Days" to educate residents about Firewise principles and promote the LAC brush chipping day.

Firewise day event each July; and the Maine Forest Service forest rangers who work in and around Waterboro have noticed that many of the residents are now more familiar with wildland fire-prevention terms such as "ladder fuels," "defensible space" and, of course, "Firewise."



Waterboro's Lake Arrowhead Community became Maine's first Firewise Community USA in November 2008. Pictured here are members of the Waterboro Fire Department, Maine Forest Service, a selectman from the town of Waterboro, and Firewise's Michele Steinberg who also attended the ceremony and toured the community.

How-To thanks Kent Nelson, fire prevention specialist in the Maine Forest Service, for contributing this article.

Editor Note: Kent is currently serving in Iraq. We wish Kent and all the service men and women a safe return home. In Kent's absence, Alan Hammond is serving as Maine's Firewise Liaison.

Around the Firewise Home

The One, Two, Three of Firewise Landscaping

By Rachel Henry

Landscaping is what makes a house truly a home. It is able to be both beautiful and give the house character. However, it is important to remember that it must be done safely and with adherence to the possible dangers of fire. This can be made easier by recognizing the three zones around one's house and how to work with them.

The first zone begins at the home and stretches outwards approximately thirty feet around the home. But it's the area within the first five to six feet from the foundation that is the most critical. This area is often densely populated by vegetation, flowers, and other decorative features. Keeping a clean and clear area around the foundation will reduce the chances of small ignitions that could ignite. Any walls near the house or bordering a garden would benefit from being made from brick, stone or plaster all of which are fire resistant. In addition, enclaves and soffits on the house should be enclosed and skylights and other windows should be covered with glass not plastic. Decks and porches should not be open, but rather fenced in with 1/8" wire mesh.

Landscape architect Randall Ismay points out that when planning the layout of vegetation in the area closest to the house, it is "important to keep in mind water access. Small ponds or the choice of plants that hold water well are important as water is a natural fire deterrent." Potted plants are another great way, Ismay emphasizes, to decorate the area surrounding the house, while having drought resistant vegetation.



Flowers and plants chosen for the area closest to the home should be low to the ground and the lawn should be mowed regularly. Homeowners should feel free to pick whatever vegetation they feel adds to their home landscape, but bear in mind the resin, oil and wax levels of those chosen as these are most susceptible to fire. Wildfires that break out near houses spread even quicker when flowers and grasses are dry and lacking hydration.

The second zone of landscaping is the area thirty to a hundred feet from the home; this area usually encompasses the lawn, any walkways or driveways and an assortment of trees. When looking at this section it is good to make sure trees are spaced apart about thirty feet or so if they are in clusters or if they are solitary twenty feet. The fuels in this area should be broken up by having walkways or driveways in between the assortment

of trees. Gravel is a great choice for walkways and is aesthetically pleasing. Breaking up trees and other fuels by pathways interrupts the continuity of the fuels that allows fires to spread.



Zone three is usually about one hundred to two hundred feet from the home. This area needs only to be cleared of debris such as wood and branches to make the landscape look clean and well tended but also lessen the spread of fire.



Basic layouts aside, it is also important to remember that the landscape around one's home should reflect the lifestyle of the owners. A beautiful landscape that requires too much attention for those that are out and about might not be the best pick. It is also worth mentioning that while the cost of creating a landscape should be considered, the real cost lies in maintenance. Once you have laid out your landscape according to the three zones and have picked out fire safe plants and done the final trimming on your trees and other vegetation feel free to lay back and enjoy.

Sources: "Firewise Guide to Landscape and Construction", "Communities Compatible with Nature" and "American Perspectives on the Wildland/Urban Interface". All products available for the cost of shipping and handling at www.firewise.org.

About the author: Ms. Henry is a sophomore at Loyola University Chicago. She is interested in communication studies and journalism in addition to cultural anthropology. She is an avid writer and interested in writing on most subjects.

Assessment and Maintenance: Motivating Seasonal Residents

For some members of your community, summertime (or wintertime) is the only time they live in their homes. While they may not be able to tend to their properties year-round, their participation in Firewise activities and in adopting Firewise practices can prove critical in the event of a wildfire. For many communities, summer also happens to be high season, when homes and property are most susceptible to the rages of wildfire. So what's a community to do to effectively engage their part-time neighbors? Following are some strategies that have worked for Firewise communities like yours when dealing with seasonal residents, along with some other suggestions that also may prove helpful.

☞ Reach out to your seasonal neighbors with a goodie bag containing Firewise and fire prevention information; copies of any pertinent rules/codes that may exist as part of a homeowner's association and/or any relevant newspaper clippings pertaining to wildfire in the area or Firewise activities



that have taken place in their absence; and a magnet or phone card listing key telephone, e-mail, and Internet information concerning local Firewise contacts and other relevant resources, along with a letter welcoming them back to the community that includes details about any upcoming events in which they can participate.

☞ Establish a website and/or MyFirewise page for your community, so that all members of the community can keep abreast of important information pertaining to your Firewise efforts.

☞ Hold an event for the entire community, including information with relevant tips for seasonal residents.



☞ Working with your state forestry agency, arrange special property assessments for seasonal residents, to assure that they are aware of the risks posed specifically to their home and property, and are provided with helpful suggestions for addressing them.

☞ Create a buddy system linking a year-round resident with a seasonal resident through which the seasonal resident can be apprised of wildfire issues or concerns that may arise in their absence.

☞ Invite a Firewise expert to speak to your community during a time when seasonal residents are present.

☞ Stage a demonstration of useful Firewise practices as part of a larger event.

☞ Establish an annual day (for chipping, evaluating defensible space, clearing brush/downfall) that will encourage participation from seasonal residents.



☞ Develop a relationship with local media contacts (at newspaper and/or local or cable access TV) who can provide timely coverage of activities and wildfire-related issues.

☞ Create a periodic newsletter (monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly) to address issues specifically pertinent to your community's wildfire concerns and Firewise efforts. You can post it on your website or also provide it in print format, making it accessible to all residents, no matter where they may be when they read it.



☞ Establish an annual award presented to a year-round and a seasonal resident, recognizing them for their exemplary Firewise efforts or leadership.



The Firewise Leader

All A Twitter® About Getting the Message Out

Using social media — Facebook®, Twitter®, LinkedIn®, MySpace® — can be fun, but also can provide new and exciting ways of reaching your neighbors, friends, and folks you may have never met with important wildfire safety information. Michele Steinberg, the communities support manager for the NFPA Firewise Communities program, has been using Twitter (www.twitter.com/firewise) since March, and has found ways to combine that outreach tool with blogs, MyFirewise®, and Facebook to drive users to the Firewise home page, publicize new products and projects, and invite people to workshops.

"I'm using my Twitter account as one way to try to get new users to our website," says Steinberg. "I have more than 250 followers now, which isn't a lot compared to some users. But the followers I do have like to re-post (or "re-Tweet") my messages, which gets the word out to many more people," she adds. "I was able to track one post that within 10 hours reached about 3,000 users."

Because there is so much information on the Firewise website, Steinberg has found that new users are delighted to learn what regular visitors already know — (that) the site has interactive games, videos, research articles, a Learning Center, and community stories for recognized Firewise Communities/USA sites. When she or other staff update a blog or post a new event, a few simple taps on the keyboard brings the update to Twitter users. The MyFirewise site is set up to easily share new blog posts, comments, and messages out to the wider world of Twitter, Facebook, and other networking sites.

In addition to pushing information

out, Steinberg has been able to monitor posts to see what others are saying about Firewise and wildfire activity, mitigation efforts, and related issues. "There are a growing number of users that post frequent, pertinent information about fire activity, wildfire policy, mitigation efforts, and more," she states, adding, "I've been able to keep on top of breaking news about major fires, such as the recent events in South Carolina and in Santa Barbara, California, which helps the national program staff learn where outreach and assistance with Firewise information may be needed."

She notes that a number of federal and state fire and forestry organizations are using Twitter very effective-

ly. Since Twitter is free and easy to use from a cellphone as well as a computer, fire officials can be effective in using it to communicate news and updates to the media and to residents of affected areas during an emergency. "Emergency management folks using this tool have told me that Twitter expands your reach to media tremendously," says Steinberg. "One person I spoke with said that before using Twitter he would get about 300 media contacts per month, mostly from local media. In his first month using Twitter, he received 9,000 media contacts from all over the nation, and 6,000 the next month."

You can follow Michele at www.twitter.com/firewise to see what it's all about. She recommends the following "Tweeters" to you as well:

www.twitter.com/ForestryOK - Oklahoma Forestry Services provide breaking wildfire news, prevention tips, and links to their Firewise resources

www.twitter.com/wildfiretoday - Bill Gabbert uses his Wildfire Today blog (www.wildfiretoday.com) to update his Twitter posts with news about wildfire events, wildland firefighting, policy and anything connected to wildfire

www.twitter.com/FireInfoGirl - this Twitterer scours numerous sources — websites, blogs, news stories — to provide constant updates on wildfire events and information around the country.

<http://twitter.com/Fireground> - From the www.fireground.com blog, Eric Neitzel posts frequent information about southwestern U.S. wildfire activity

<http://twitter.com/LAFDtalk> - The Los Angeles Fire Department posts all kinds of fire safety information, including reminders to become Firewise.

Editor's Note: If you are proud of your community's efforts or think you have a unique activity that could benefit other Firewise communities, please share the information with "How-To Newsletter" by submitting a description of your activity and how it has helped with wildfire mitigation in your community to Michele Steinberg at msteinberg@nfpa.org.

Firewise By The Numbers

Firewise Communities/USA sites are spreading like, well, wildfire. The only difference is we don't want to contain you. We want to sustain you and help you spread to neighboring communities, so in the event of a wildfire, more of you are prepared to prevent fire from reaching you, your homes, and property. Since the spring issue of "How To", 24 new communities received recognition status, for a total of 470 communities with Firewise status. Louisiana re-joined the ranks of Firewise this quarter, with 38 states throughout the U.S. now having at least one Firewise Communities/USA recognition sign along its roadways. Among the many already-recognized communities, 85% percent have successfully renewed since first attaining Firewise status. *How-To Newsletter* is pleased to welcome the following communities:

Arizona – Pine Cayon

Arkansas – Lawson

California – Concow/Yankee Hill; Marinview

Georgia – Jekyll Island; Lake Yonah

Idaho – Kanaka Rapids

Louisiana – Longleaf

North Carolina – Fontana Lake Estates

Oregon – River Meadows

Pennsylvania – Towamensing Trails

Texas – Los Venados

Utah – Farmington

Virginia – Coal Bank Ridge; Langhorne Road; Portobago Bay

Washington – Fox Hall; Hannah Heights; Jenkins Lane; Ponderosa Park; Timber Lane; Westview Woods; Wold Road South

Wisconsin – Double Bogey Addition of Lake Arrowhead

Think your community should try for Firewise Communities/USA status? For Additional information on the Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program, visit www.firewise.org/usa. And remember, you can contact your state forest service liaison for assistance; he or she is an excellent resource for guidance in formulating your plan and offering activities that can energize your community to take part. The Firewise web site includes this contact information as well.

Firewise Expert Announces Retirement

After more than 15 years as a "Firewise guru," Judith Leraas Cook is retiring from full-time work with the national Firewise Communities program. Judith, one of the original creators of the Firewise concept, has worked as part of the national Firewise Communities team since the early 1990s. In 1995, she initiated the Firewise Home Page (<http://www.firewise.org>) and, in 1999, she was on the design team that created and tested the Firewise Communities/USA recognition project. The recognition program grew from 12 pilot sites to more than 470 communities in 38 states during her tenure as project manager. According to Firewise Communities Support Manager Michele Steinberg, "The success and growth of the Firewise Communities/USA recognition program – which now reaches more than 475,000 residents in fire-prone areas – owes much to Judith's vision, leadership, and dedication, as well as her connection with community residents, fire officials, and state forestry professionals."

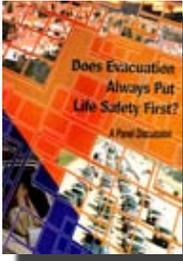
Prior to her work with Firewise, Judith worked at the federal, state and municipal government levels on forestry and fire issues. She served as the National Fire Prevention Officer for the USDA-Forest Service in Washington, D.C. where she was the agency's representative to both the National Wildland/Urban Interface Fire Protection Program and the Fire Prevention Working Team, both part of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. She was Executive Director for the Keep Washington Green Association in Seattle, Washington and Public Affairs Administrator for the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

"The Firewise program staff – and I'm sure many others – wish Judith a happy and enjoyable retirement," said Steinberg. "We will sincerely miss her energetic presence and all the hard work she put into the program every day." Steinberg added that Firewise liaisons and community representatives should be sure to contact the Firewise program for technical assistance and information on wildfire safety resources.



Does Evacuation Always Put Life Safety First?

DVD offers frank discussion about evacuating during a wildfire.



In 2007, the Firewise Communities introduced a new DVD to its collection of educational resources for members of the wildland fire community. The two-disk DVD ROM set is called "Does Evacuation Always Put Life Safety First? A Panel Discussion," featuring a session documented at the 2006 Firewise Communities Conference (Backyards & Beyond). The panelists address the potential threat to communities as wildfires grow and explore issues faced by residents and fire incident command staff in evacuation efforts. The set is available from the Firewise online catalog at www.firewise.org.

Think you've missed an important Firewise article?

Visit the *Firewise Article Archive* at www.Firewise.org/library/index.php. You'll have access to countless Firewise articles at the click of your mouse!



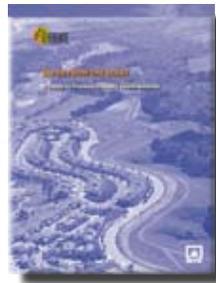
Reading Up

'Planning to build in the wildland/urban interface?'



'Want to be sure your new home meets recommended Firewise standards and use resources that aid fire prevention?'

Learn how you can make your home or subdivision safer from the "start" with the new document "*Safer from the Start: A Guide to Firewise-Friendly Developments*," now available on the Firewise website. Simply visit the [Resources](#) – For the Homeowner area on the Firewise home page, or go to: <http://www.firewise.org/resources/files/Safer-From-the-Start.pdf>. Look for the published version from the Firewise online catalog in late July.



WUI Home Ignition Research Studies



Wildland/urban interface home ignition research studies are now available for download. Jack Cohen of the USDA Forest Service conducted significant research that is relevant to

Firewise Communities. To download and read Jack's research go to: http://www.firewise.org/resources/wui_hir.htm

Additional Sources of Information



Web Sources

To access information addressed in this issue of *How-To Newsletter*, visit the following websites:

- MyFirewise — <http://network.firewise.org>
- Twitter — <http://www.twitter.com>
- Safer from the Start: A Guide to Firewise-Friendly Developments — <http://www.firewise.org/resources/files/Safer-From-the-Start.pdf>

New Online Course: Conducting Community Assessments in the Wildland/Urban Interface: Beginning the Firewise Process

Visit the Firewise Learning Center at http://www.firewise.org/fw_youcanuse/learningcenter/ to enroll in the latest course from Firewise. *Conducting Community Assessments in the Wildland/Urban Interface: Beginning the Firewise Process* will teach you how to help residents of WUI areas what they can do to become safer from wildfire, using a tested community assessment methodology. The course's eight lessons cover the following topics:

1. *Introduction to the WUI Fire Problem*
2. *Fire Basics*
3. *The Home Ignition Zone*
4. *Reducing Home Ignition Risks*
5. *Community Assessment Basics*
6. *Preparing the Assessment*
7. *Community Engagement and Firewise*
8. *Summary*

The course has audio narration and includes video clips from other Firewise training modules. Learners can download the course script to more easily follow along or review when away from the computer. Additional resources include the recommended community assessment template, making it easy for those conducting assessments to produce a report to provide to residents. Links to case studies, articles, and relevant Firewise products and modules are also part of the course.

Do you know what your tree care IQ is?

Go to: http://forestry.about.com/library/quiz/blwellness_quiz.htm and take the "Tree Wellness Quiz" to see if you are prepared to successfully plant and care for your trees. The quiz is quick, simple, and informing. You will also find lots of other great tree and plant information at the main site: <http://forestry.about.com>. While visiting the site, be sure to sign up for the free newsletter.

Answer to Page 8 Question:

The oldest tree in the Eastern United States is in Charleston, South Carolina and it is an "Angel Oak".

Source: <http://forestry.about.com>

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