

Pasadena Man Sentenced to State Prison for Arson of JPL Satellite Dish

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PASADENA – A Pasadena man who pleaded guilty to arson and was sentenced to a three-year state prison term for torching a prototype satellite dish at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) faces a restitution hearing early next month, the District Attorney's office announced today.

The \$800,000 satellite dish on JPL property in Pasadena sustained a little more than \$180,300 in damage in the March 13, 2006, arson fire. The dish is a prototype being developed at JPL by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Tyrone Willkerson, 49, was arrested on the grounds by Sheriff's deputies. He was charged on March 15 with one count each of arson to the property of another, vandalism with more than \$400 damage and possession of flammable materials. The other two counts were dismissed on Oct. 10 after Pasadena Superior Court Judge Fred J. Fukioka sentenced Willkerson to the state prison term. The restitution hearing will be in Fukioka's court on Nov. 3.

Investigators said Willkerson parked his car at nearby La Canada High School, cut through two fences and took apart a third to get into JPL's compound. They said he carried two gallon cans of flammable liquid, a bucket of rags, road flares and other materials onto JPL grounds and set the base of the satellite dish on fire. The dish sustained electrical and fiber optic cable damage before the fire could be extinguished, federal authorities said.

Willkerson was arrested by deputies from the Crescenta Valley Sheriff's Station. The case was investigated by the Sheriff's Arson/Explosives Detail and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Office of Inspector General.

Deputy District Attorney Eric Levine of the Pasadena office prosecuted Willkerson.

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