

Cowichan Valley



Safety Audit Guide

COWICHAN VALLEY SAFETY AUDIT GUIDE

Produced by:
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Funded by:

B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality
Cowichan Valley Regional District

We would like to acknowledge METRAC as the originators of the Safety Audit concept. This guide has been adapted, with permission, from the Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC). METRAC did not originally copyright the Safety Audit Guide in order to encourage the widest possible use.



We welcome any comments, suggestions or question regarding this guide. Please contact: Cowichan Valley Safety Audit Project

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Introduction

Personal safety is an important part of community living. Across Canada, many communities are responding to the needs and concerns of people to ensure that the places we live, work, shop and spend our leisure time are safe and accessible for everyone.

This guide has been developed to assist people in the Cowichan Valley and surrounding areas to assess personal safety in their communities, and to help these people work toward changes that they feel are necessary. It can be used by anyone - community organizations, schools, staff and management of businesses or government offices, and interested individuals who want to mobilize their neighbourhood to improve safety.

Safety audits sound simple, and they are. You don't have to be a planner or architect to know what your community needs for you to feel safe. In a safety audit, community members are the experts.



This guide will describe how to do a safety audit, all the way from identifying and defining problems, to getting a group of people together to do an audit, to organizing the results and working for change.

It will also provide some examples of survey questions, written results, and letters, for you to draw upon..

What do we mean by Safety?

Very often, safety is considered with respect to health, traffic and environmental hazards. Safety audits can consider all of these, but their main focus is on **personal safety**.

Personal safety refers to how people feel in their living and working environments. This is important because how people feel will affect how they can use - or not use - their communities.

Perceptions of safety will depend on many things, such as our past experiences in a certain place, or reports of experiences of others. People's experiences and feelings about their communities may vary, depending on such factors as a person's gender, age, race/ethnicity, physical and intellectual abilities, economics and sexuality.

The key to successful audits is to focus on the safety of people who are the most affected by risks and fear of violence in their communities.

For this reason, safety audits often concentrate on the safety of women and children.



Scope of Violence

A national survey of Canadian women in 1993 found that:

- * One out of every two women in Canada past age 16 has been physically or sexually assaulted by a man at least once.
- * One out of every three women in British Columbia is assaulted by her partner.
- * 38% of women have been sexually assaulted, about half by someone known to them.
- * Only about 6% of sexual assaults are ever reported to police. Of these, only about 16% make it to court.

Nationally, for women in the following situations:

- * 55% are worried about walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark,
- * 83% are worried about walking alone to their car in a parking garage,
- * 40% are worried about being home alone at night,
- * 76% are worried about using public transportation after dark.



For many women, concerns about personal safety means restricting activities and taking precautions to avoid danger. Many women avoid going out at night alone, choose their travel routes with caution, avoid certain places or activities, including meetings or night classes.

Taking responsibility for personal safety is important, but women shouldn't have to miss out on community activities or job opportunities because they are worried about their personal safety. It is also important to remember that many people don't have a choice about where to live, work, or how to travel.

What is a Safety Audit?

The main goals of a safety audit are to reduce opportunities for assault and harassment and increase sense of safety. An audit is a simple and practical way to investigate places in a community where people feel concerned about their personal safety. They can be carried out almost anywhere, including:

- urban and rural neighbourhoods
- workplaces and schools
- commercial areas
- public washrooms
- recreation centres, parks and open spaces
- trails and paths
- streets, roads and laneways
- buildings (outside and inside)
- parking lots and garages
- transit services and bus stops
- industrial areas
- colleges and universities



The basic process of a safety audit is to identify why an area or building feels unsafe by walking through it, talking about it, and writing down observations.

Afterwards, the observations and findings are discussed to try and find workable solutions to improve the area.

Safety audits look at various aspects of the physical environment - both indoors and outdoors, including:

Overall Design, Accessibility

- Is it easy to find your way around an area?
- Would you know where you could get help?
- Are there safe routes for people to walk and jog?
- Is there adequate public transportation?

Isolation

- Does the area/building feel isolated?
- Would anyone hear a call for help?

Darkness or inadequate lighting

- Is lighting obscured by bushes, trees?
- Are pedestrian walkways, sidewalks, parking areas illuminated?

Hiding and entrapment spots

- Are there places where someone could hide?
- Are there small areas where someone could get trapped?(bushes, fences, out-buildings, hallways)

Maintenance

- Does the area feel cared for? Is there a lot of garbage, graffiti?



Safety audits also ask these questions from a variety of perspectives, for example,

What if I were elderly, had a disability, or didn't speak English?

BENEFITS

- ⇒ Safety audits can help to bring about improvements to physical environments - obvious things like fixing burned out lights, adding more lights, cleaning up an area or adding security.
- ⇒ Audits can also identify programs, policies and practices needed to enhance safety.
- ⇒ Safety audits can increase awareness and understanding of people's concerns. They provide important information for planners and elected officials.
- ⇒ They are an excellent tool for involving people in community decision-making processes. They may also prompt other groups to act on the concerns identified.

STEPS FOR DOING A SAFETY AUDIT

***ONE:* Deciding Where to do the Safety Audit**

Large or Small - Urban or Rural

Safety audits can be done for both urban and rural areas. Cowichan Women Against Violence has carried out broad community safety audits in the C.V.R.D. that have involved looking at large and small areas such as shopping centres, neighbourhood parks, recreational trails, rural roads, community centres, commercial centres, highways, residential streets.

Local and Neighbourhood

You probably already know what places make you feel uneasy in your community and what it is about those places that causes you concern. If you are concerned about one area in particular and have already talked to others who share your concerns, going to the next step and doing the audit walk with your group is fairly simple.

Community

However, if you are carrying out a broader community safety audit, **involving the community** in defining aspects of the community that feel unsafe is an important first step. This can be done through talking to individuals and groups in your community, and/or through a survey of neighbourhood residents, businesses, workplaces or school or all of the above.

In addition to the information you will gain, the benefits of this kind of community outreach are the involvement and sense of community it can create.

And— involving more people in the process also means more people involved in the solutions.



SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Are you ever concerned for your personal safety in thearea / building?
at home,
at work,
in public places
2. Do you avoid places or take special precautions to ensure your and your children's safety?
3. Please name specific places where you feel concerned.
4. What about these places makes you feel unsafe?
5. What would help to make you feel safer in your community?

Two: Forming a Group to do the Audits

How many people are needed?

Generally, the number of people on a team should be between **three and eight**. This gives enough people to provide for safety, but not too many as to create a false sense of safety.

If a lot of people are interested in auditing the same place, dividing into two or more groups, **going out on different days or nights and comparing results will enhance your findings.**

Who should be involved?

It is important that an audit team be representative of a range of people who live in an area or community to ensure the widest possible number of viewpoints. Safety issues are as diverse as the people who live in a community, so try to have your team represent that diversity.

You may want to contact some or all of the following: Individuals and Community groups representing rural women, children and youth, aboriginal women, immigrant women, women with disabilities, seniors; highschool and college students.



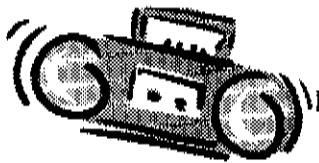
- ⇒ Involving people who can help with implementing solutions is also important. Elected officials, community planners, RCMP, business owners and managers can all be invited to participate.
- ⇒ If you are doing an audit of your workplace, invite managers and union reps. If you are auditing a school or campus, invite students, staff and security personnel.

Important:

One of the biggest challenges to participation people face is just being able to get out to participate. Transportation, childcare, safety of young people, seniors, people with disabilities can be big challenges and should be thought about in the planning stage.

Getting the Word Out

Even though you have done a survey and talked with people and groups in the area, you may find it helpful to distribute posters and advertise your audit to try to reach out to as many people as possible.



Try: Community newspapers are often supportive of initiatives and will print a news article, they also have free sections for community ads; try community groups and schools that put out newsletters; local cable and radio stations, churches, temples.

THREE: Planning and Preparations

When should a safety audit be done?



Most safety audits are done at night when a place is at its darkest and problems of isolation and lack of lighting are most evident. However, sometimes problems are associated with morning or afternoon, weekday or weekend, or a particular season.



For example, small rural communities that are quiet from fall to spring may feel less safe if there is an influx of tourists during summer.

On the other hand, places that feel okay in summer when daylight hours are longer, may feel quite different in the darker months when weather is at its worst.

Campuses and schools that are busy in the day may feel quite isolated for staff and students who use them at night.

Getting There - Be Safe!

Before doing the audit, you will have decided on and arranged a time and place to meet. It is important to check in with participants as to how they are getting to and from the site, and where possible, arrange for car pooling or other transportation to ensure safety of everyone.



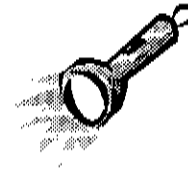
How much time to allow?

Allow approximately **2 -3 hours** -at least half an hour to meet and greet and talk about what you want to accomplish; at least one hour to walk around, and half to one hour to discuss the findings.

What to bring

Ideally, everyone should have:

- ⇒ a flashlight (for evening audits)
- ⇒ a clipboard, paper, pencil or pen
- ⇒ comfortable walking shoes
- ⇒ clothing appropriate for the weather



Helpful:

A camera or tape recorder.
Reflective vests or tape.

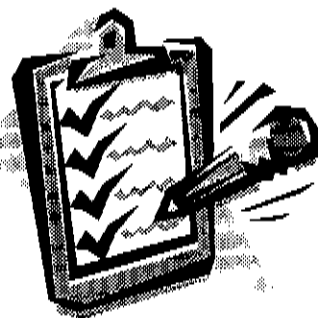


If you are a community group or agency that is facilitating the audit, arranging a place to meet before and after and providing refreshments will lend a lot to your evening.



The Safety Audit Checklist

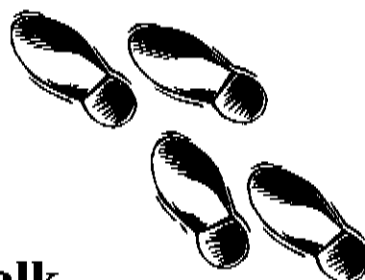
The safety audit checklist provided in the centre of this book contains a list of questions about factors that can affect safety and sense of safety in an area or building.



In our experience with Safety Audits, Cowichan Women Against Violence has found that some people prefer to just use their instincts on the audit, and not use the checklist at all.

However, the checklist is a useful tool to prompt questions before you walk through an area, and to think about afterwards.

Whether or not you decide to use the checklist on the actual audit, we recommend that you read it before and after to ensure you have looked at as many aspects of a place as possible.



FOUR: The Audit Walk

The basic questions you will be asking about a place are:

- * What do I like and what don't I like about this place?
- * What about this place makes me feel uncomfortable?
- * What changes would make me feel safer?

SAFETY AUDIT CHECKLIST

The following checklist suggests a number of factors which may be considered for a given area.

Some of the factors may not be relevant to your safety audit and can be left out.

More detailed checklists to examine places like parks and buildings, or for assessing places for accessibility for people with disabilities, are available in other safety audit publications.

For more information on specialized safety audits, call

**Cowichan Women Against Violence Society -
Safer Futures Program Office
at 746-9221**

The following checklist can be removed and each page enlarged on a photocopy machine.

SAFETY AUDIT CHECKLIST

DATE: _____
TIME: _____
AREA: _____
REASON FOR AUDIT: _____

1. GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

What is your first reaction to the area:

2. OVERALL DESIGN

If you weren't familiar with the place, would it be easy to find your way around?
yes no
Does the place "make sense"? yes no
Is it easily accessible? yes no

Comments?

3. LIGHTING

Impression of lighting:
poor satisfactory good
Is the lighting even? Yes No
How many lights are out? _____
Can you identify a person's face 25 metres (75 feet) away? Yes No
Is lighting obscured by trees or bushes or other structures? Yes No

If yes, please explain

How well does the lighting illuminate pedestrian walkways and sidewalks?
poorly satisfactorily well very well
Directional/location signs or maps?
poorly satisfactorily well
Doorways
poorly satisfactorily well

4. ISOLATION

At the time of your audit, does the area feel isolated? Yes No

If yes, why? _____

How many people are likely to be around?
In the early morning: _____
During the day: _____
In the evening: _____

Can't predict _____
How far away is the nearest person to hear a call for help? _____

How far away is the nearest emergency service such as an alarm, security personnel, crisis telephone? _____

5. SIGNAGE

Are there directional signs or maps to help you identify

Where you are? Yes No

How to get emergency assistance? Yes No

Wheelchair access? Yes No

Entrances / exits? Yes No

Are there signs that should be added / changed?

6. SIGHTLINES

Can you clearly see what is in front of you in your path? Yes No

If no, why not?
Indoors:
sharp corners walls pillars

Outdoors:
bushes fences hill
Other: _____

Are there places someone could be hiding? Yes No
If yes, where?

What would make it easier to see?

- transparent materials like glass
- angled corners security mirrors
- trimmed bushes vehicles moved

Comments?

7. MOVEMENT PREDICTORS

How easy is it to predict someone's movements? (e.g. her route)?

- not very easy easy very easy

Is there an alternative well-lit and frequently travelled route or path available?

- yes no don't know

Can you tell what is at the other end of the path, tunnel, or walkway?

- yes no

Are there corners, alcoves, or bushes where someone could hide and wait for you?

- yes no

Comments?

8. ENTRAPMENT SITES

Indoors:

Are there empty rooms that should be locked?

- yes no

Are there small, enclosed areas? E.g.:

- stairwells recessed doorways or lockers
- unlocked closets elevators

Outdoors:

Are there small, confined areas where you would be hidden from view? E.g.:

- between garbage bins
- unlocked equipment or utility shed
- alley or laneway recessed doorway
- construction site

Other: _____

9. ESCAPE ROUTES

How easy would it be for an offender to disappear? quite easy not very easy

Is there more than one exit?

- yes no don't know

10. MAINTENANCE

Do you know to whom maintenance concerns should be reported?

- yes no

Does the place feel cared for? yes no

Does the place feel abandoned? yes no

Why? _____

Is there graffiti on the walls? yes no

Is there litter lying around? yes no

Are there signs of vandalism? yes no

Comments?

11. IMPROVEMENTS

What improvements would you like to see?

Please use the back of this form and /or additional paper to summarize your observations.

12. ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Did you check to see if public telephones are working?

Did you talk to people along the way?

Were you able to ask questions from various perspectives?

i.e. What if I were:

- sight impaired?
- in a wheelchair?

NOTES

Try to apply the questions and answers to different situations.

- * What if I or my child were waiting here for a ride?
- * What if I were alone here at night?
- * Would I feel safe here if I were a senior, had a disability, had my hands full of groceries, etc.
- * What if I didn't own a car and relied on walking or public transportation?
- * What if I were new to the area/country, didn't know my way around and/or didn't speak or read English as a first language?

Tips:

- ◇ No matter how good you think your memory is, take good notes!
- ◇ Talk to people you meet along the way and ask them for their opinions about their personal safety.
- ◇ Test out various aspects, for example,
 - ⇒ Check out public telephones along the way to see if they are working and if they look well maintained.
 - ⇒ Check in the back seat of vehicles parked in a lot to see if you can see into the back seat.



Some ground rules:

1. Be sensitive to differing views and feelings.

Perceptions of safety are different for each person. It is very important that no one's feelings are put down or minimized (e.g. "Everyone knows you shouldn't even be here at night," or "That's silly, I never feel afraid here.").

2. Be respectful. Statements that put down other people should be discouraged!

FIVE: After the Audit

- i) Even though you will have done a lot of talking during the audit walk, it is helpful to take some time at the end to discuss your observations and do some brainstorming about solutions.
- ii) If possible, arrange to meet again and discuss your findings in detail. This may be difficult for people who are busy with their daily lives, so you may want to designate one person to write up the findings for people to read and comment on.

Organizing Your Findings



How you put your notes together can depend on the size of area you audited and the number and types of problems you noted.

For example, if your audit looked at a small area such as a parking lot and found the main problem to be lack of lighting, your follow-up actions may simply be to write a letter to appropriate departments to request improvements.

In auditing a larger area, you may find a lot of problems which call for actions from various authorities. It will be helpful to organize your findings and prepare a written report.

The following provides an example area - how a summary can be written up for a smaller area. For a larger area, you may have much more information that will need to be organized by geographical areas.

SAMPLE #1: **SAFETY AUDIT FINDINGS**

Location: Building and parking lot

Date of audit: November, 1997, 7:00 p.m.

Reason for Audit:

The area has been identified by people as feeling unsafe especially in the evening hours when few people are around.

Observations from the Safety Audit Walk:

Building Interior

Main hallways are poorly lit and have blind corners.

Back door near the arena was unlocked? is this a good idea?

We couldn't tell how to find someone in charge.

Washrooms near the arena are covered in graffiti. Children use these and some of the language is very bad.

Parking Lot:

The row of bushes in the main parking area provides hiding and entrapment spots and blocks lighting.

Stairway leading up to the building entrance was dark - this felt unsafe, but is also a hazard as people can't see where they are walking.

Solutions / Recommendations:

install additional lighting in main hallways and/or paint them a light color.

Install convex mirrors at blind corners in all hallways.

Clean up graffiti in washrooms.

Thin hedges in parking lot. Advise that future plans for landscaping plant with visibility in mind.

Add a light near the front stairs. Put reflective tape on stairs.

Post information at all entrances and in hallways as to where to find a staff person at night and how to get to emergency telephone.

Provide information to staff people about personal safety concerns and request that accompaniment to cars be part of their duties.

Working for change

At this point, you will have a list / summary of points about an area or building that have been identified as feeling unsafe, and suggestions as to how problems can be solved.

Some of the solutions may be quite simple and straight forward, such as installing lights in certain places, or cleaning up derogatory graffiti. Other solutions may be more complex, require long term planning and need to involve other members and groups in the community.

Important : Sometimes not everyone will agree upon the same solution. If this is the case you should not throw out a suggestion! Rather, keep it as an option for the future.

1. Share the Results

Talk with people who couldn't participate, and anyone else who you think will be interested in your audit. This will be helpful in getting additional input, ideas and support.

A Key contact will be:

The CVRD has established the Women's Safety Advisory Committee to advise on personal safety matters relating to local government. You can contact Cowichan Women Against Violence or the CVRD Development Services Department for more information. (See the list of Helpful Numbers on Page 31)

2. Make your Recommendations

Important: Try not to get overwhelmed by possible road-blocks or the size of the task. Rome wasn't built in day, and you have already succeeded just by being a part of the process of the audit.

3. Decide which tasks you can act on first.

Prioritize your concerns and list changes from easiest to most difficult. Do the easiest first, and work through your list one item at a time.

Set a time frame. Example: We will write a letter this week, request a reply by the end of the month and will see how it went at our next meeting.

4. Make a list of people and departments you need to approach to request action.

If you're not sure about who to contact, a good resource will be your local elected representative, councilor or planner.

5. Contacts.

Call and/or write a letter with a copy of your report. (The following page provides a sample letter.) If possible, request to meet with the person(s) responsible.



SAMPLE LETTER #1

November, 1997

Building Manager
Address

Dear Sir/Madam,

Last week I called you to tell you about our group's wish to conduct a safety audit of the area. I appreciated your willingness to discuss this topic. I am writing to give you the results of our survey and the safety audit walk that we did yesterday evening. We are enclosing a summary of our observations and the recommendations put forward by participants.

As you will see, some of the solutions we are suggesting are quite simple, such as installing reflective tape on stairs, trimming shrubs and cleaning up graffiti in the women's washroom. We hope that you will instruct your maintenance staff to act promptly to make repairs and improvements.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and discuss our findings and answer any questions you may have. In the meantime, we look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Thank you very much for your time.

Yours truly,

Jane Doe, Organizer

SAMPLE LETTER #2



NEIGHBOURHOOD PORCH LIGHTS ON

November, 1997

Dear Neighbour,

Safety is a concern in this neighbourhood. Leaving our porchlights on from sunset to dawn is a very simple and highly effective measure to improve our security.

The exact cost varies (by area and according to kilowatt hours) but is about 60 cents per month for a 40 watt bulb. We urge you to join this neighbourhood effort and leave your front and back outdoor lights on all night long.

Thank you,

Getting Results

It is important to remember that change can take time, and personal safety may be a new and even foreign consideration for some people and authorities.

Some common problems you may encounter are:

1. We've never had any problems here.

(The "perception versus reality" debate).

Sometimes people will argue that even though a place feels unsafe, there have been no reported crimes there, so in reality, it is safe. *Generally, if it feels unsafe, there is a problem, and it will be important to explain the issues.*

2. "We have no control over that."

If an issue falls under the responsibility of another department or agency, you may have to continue on to find the person or agency responsible.

Ask who is the responsible person or agency.

Request the support of the first person, group or agency you talked to and ask them to write a letter in your favour. Ask your elected representative or council to work with you for change.

3. "We have no money in our budget."

If you have approached an agency or government department for action and they support your concerns but have no resources or funds to make the changes you request, you may need to search for creative alternatives or solutions. You might also ask that next year's or the following year's budget include your request and make it a priority.

Examples:

In neighbourhoods and communities where there is no money in the budget for streetlighting, **Porch Light On Campaigns** have been done as interim measures to improve levels of lighting. Neighbours are asked to leave their porch lights on to help illuminate sidewalks and streets.

Getting additional RCMP surveillance for an area might be impossible due to lack of resources, but you might be able to get volunteer initiatives going such as Neighbourhood Watch, or SpeedWatch. You might also be able to ask for co-operation from local businesses and develop a Street-Watch Program.

Follow-up Tips

Keep in Touch

After you have done all the work of the safety audit and have approached authorities to ask for changes, it may be important to ask for a reply within a certain time-frame (e.g., one month). If you don't hear back, contact that person or agency again to check in.

Acknowledge and Thank Participants

Remember to thank everyone who helped and to acknowledge any and all contributions. Send a letter and/or publicize your successes!

SPECIAL AUDITS

Policies, Practices and Services

Improving physical places is only one part of personal safety. Often in the course of a safety audit, people will note ways that businesses, agencies and institutions can play a part in helping people to feel safer through understanding concerns and addressing them in their policies, practices and services.

Some examples include:

Community

- * Is there enough information available in the community about violence prevention and available services? Are there affordable and accessible self-defence courses available for women?

Workplaces

- * Does your workplace have safety and harassment policies? Do you know what to do if you are being harassed at work

Public Transportation

- * Is there safe and affordable public transportation available in the community?
- * Are stops located where they are needed? Do stops feel safe for women who must use them?
- * Do transit services meet the needs of people who depend on them? Are they accessible for:
 - * Seniors, youth, people who don't own a car?
 - * Women who work or attend school at night?

HELPFUL NUMBERS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES

Cowichan Valley Regional District

Administration Office/Directors	746-2500
Development Services - Planning	746-2620
Emergency Program Coordinator	746-2500

MUNICIPALITIES

District of North Cowichan.....	746-3100
Town of Ladysmith.....	245-6400
Town of Lake Cowichan.....	749-6681
City of Duncan.....	746-6126

R.C.M.P. DETACHMENTS (NON-EMERGENCY ONLY)

Duncan/North Cowichan.....	748-5522
Chemainus and Crofton	246-3254
Ladysmith	245-2215
Lake Cowichan, Youbou, Mesachie Lake, Caycuse, Honeymoon Bay.....	749-6668
Shawnigan, Mill Bay, Cobble Hill, Malahat	743-5514

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES

Ministry of Women's Equality	746-1268
Member of Legislative Assembly	
Cowichan-Ladysmith	748-2100
Malahat-Juan de Fuca.....	743-3445
Ministry of Transportation and Highways	
Duncan, Lake Cowichan	952-4487
Malahat, South End	952-4486

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Cowichan Women Against Violence.....	748-7000
Cowichan Valley Safety Audit Office.....	746-9221
Cowichan Valley Independent Living Resource Centre	746-3930
Cowichan Valley Intercultural and Immigrant Aid Society	748-3112
Community Options Society	748-0232
Hiiye`yuLelum Society - House of Friendship.....	748-2422
Cowichan Seniors Advisory Society	748-2133
Cowichan Senior Peer Counsellors	746-4413
Cowichan Spirit of Women	746-6022
Cowichan Valley Volunteer Society	748-2133
(a good resource to find out more about community groups)	



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