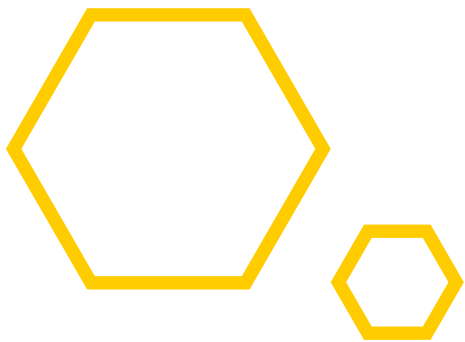


# WHAT WORKS TO PREVENT DOMESTIC BURGLARIES?

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**It is wise to  
spend public  
money on  
what works**

**#StopDomesticBurglaries**

# 01

## INTRODUCTION

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01

Since 2019, the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) and several European countries have organised the EU-wide Focus Day on domestic burglary. The aim of this initiative is to step up the fight against this type of crime by informing citizens how they can protect their homes. This type of crime has been decreasing for many years in most European countries, but it still accounts for the majority of Organised Property Crime offences. Besides, it not only robs people of their possessions but also of their sense of security at home and it has a significant financial impact on society.

Nevertheless, not everything works. As one of the key functions of the Network is to be a catalyst for facilitating more effective policies and initiatives, this paper aims to support European, national and local stakeholders by providing an overview of the initiatives which may, or may not, be successful in preventing domestic burglaries. All initiatives have been grouped in three categories: namely those for which strong evidence, moderate evidence or limited evidence is available. When labelling an initiative as having 'strong evidence', it means that several studies have consistently shown a reduction in the number of domestic burglaries, such as the one that was found to occur following target hardening by employing a combination of window locks, internal lights, door locks and external lights. Initiatives with the 'moderate evidence' label are those for which a limited number of studies have shown a promising impact in terms of crime reduction, such as property marking. However, more research is needed for this to be labelled 'strong evidence'. Others, such as intruder alarm systems, have shown contradictory results or have not been evaluated properly yet but contain some characteristics that seem promising and deserve more attention. Finally, we would like to emphasise that lessons learned during implementation and the specific context should always be taken into account when policy makers and practitioners develop their own domestic burglary prevention strategies.

# 02 STRONG EVIDENCE

## 2.1 Target hardening

Target hardening will increase the offender's perception of the effort required to enter a given household. Since an increased effort equals increased time and hence an increased level of risk, it has a deterrent effect on burglars.<sup>1</sup> Target hardening through the combination of window locks, internal lights, door locks and external lights (**WIDE**) is the most effective combination with which to prevent domestic burglaries and it also provides the best value for money.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, **internal lighting on a timer** gives the impression of the house being occupied even if no one is home.<sup>3</sup> This is an important security measure, since occupancy is a key factor in the decision to target a property.<sup>4</sup> More than nine out of ten convicted burglars reported that they would never purposely enter an occupied property. A car parked on the driveway or a radio playing while at work could also contribute to this.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, **external lighting on a timer** can reduce burglaries in the evening and at night owing to the increased risk of detection, disruption and deterrence.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, strong **window and door locks** are designed to prevent entry or make entry more difficult,<sup>7</sup> reducing accessibility, a second consideration frequently made by burglars in their target decision-making process.<sup>8</sup> Offender research has shown that the quality of physical security is a primary determinant in deciding whether to burgle a property.<sup>9</sup> However, effectively closing windows and doors relies on human activity, in contrast to the previous two measures which once set up, should function automatically.<sup>10</sup>

If more devices can be afforded, the highest total protection can be gained by CCTV, window and door locks and security chains.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, this combination has some limitations. Firstly, **security chains** are designed to restrict access to a property, however they usually cannot be seen from the outside and consequently cannot deter burglars. Additionally, in most cases they rely on someone being in the property for them to be used and they pose potential fire hazards.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, **CCTV** cameras are predominantly designed to act as a visible deterrent which may increase the risk of being caught but do not physically prevent entry. Besides, installing CCTV involves a high cost. Therefore, it is recommended to invest in WIDE since it is a cheaper and safer option.

The effectiveness of the implementation of WIDE has been shown in numerous studies. Two best practices which prevent domestic burglaries through target hardening originate from the Netherlands.



### **BEST PRACTICE:** BURGLAR-RESISTANCE INCORPORATED IN THE BUILDING DECREE

After the Netherlands introduced in 1999 new building regulations that required more burglar-proof windows and doors, the frequency of burglaries fell by a quarter for homes that were built according to the new regulations. It has been calculated that at least 10,000 burglaries have been prevented in the decade since the new building regulations were introduced. **No indications of any displacement effect**, either to “old” houses or to other forms of theft, have been observed. In contrast, some studies indicate that a positive displacement effect occurs. The security effects are to some extent transferred to neighbouring homes that are not secured.<sup>13</sup>



### **BEST PRACTICE:** POLICE QUALITY MARK

Besides the new building regulations, the Netherlands also introduced the Dutch Police Quality Mark (PQM) in 1995. There are two main differences between both. Firstly, the PQM goes even further than the building regulations. While the latter focuses merely on hinges and locks, the PQM includes additional requirements regarding lighting, sight, security of windows, doors and skylights. Secondly, the Building Decree is mandatory while the application of the PQM is voluntarily and depends on the willingness of the house owner or project developers.

The quality mark can be applied to existing houses, new buildings and public spaces. The Dutch Centre for Crime Prevention and Safety has developed a manual for each situation.<sup>14</sup>

Research has shown that houses with a PQM are targeted less by burglars and that the chances of becoming a victim (successful burglary) in a PQM house is 78% lower than in a non-certified house. If the requirements are implemented in the building phase, the reduction is even higher.<sup>15</sup>



## 2.2 Neighbourhood watch

The idea behind neighbourhood watch is to reduce crime by residents organising themselves and keeping their eyes and ears open. If they see or hear something suspicious, they call the police. Residents can help each other, for example by emptying their mailbox or mowing their neighbour's lawn while they are away on holiday. This increased surveillance deters criminals because of the increased risk of being caught. By creating signs of occupancy, a key factor in the decision to target a property, it is much harder for the burglar to determine whether or not a dwelling is empty. In addition, neighbourhood watch schemes improve social cohesion. Citizens develop a set of norms for the area and they organise themselves to limit deviant actions such as crime.<sup>16</sup>

The residents themselves, or the local police, may take the initiative to set up a structured neighbourhood watch. The crime rate in the local area and whether crime rates in the area are low, medium or high, determine the involvement of the police in setting up such a scheme. Low-crime areas only require passive involvement from the police, while the police may need to take the lead in implementing Neighbourhood Watch schemes in high-crime areas.<sup>17</sup> When implementing a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, it can be a stand-alone scheme, or part of a more comprehensive programme.<sup>18</sup>

Its crime prevention effects have been evaluated in a number of studies; unfortunately, most of these were carried out in the US and the UK, where crime prevention programmes are more often subjected to impact evaluations than continental Europe. A statistical meta-analysis shows that introducing such schemes has clear effects in reducing crime. Areas covered by neighbourhood watch schemes experienced a reduction in crime between 16% and 26% compared with areas not covered by the schemes. The positive effect on crime is independent of both the size and the type of surveillance programme.<sup>19</sup> However, the evidence related predominantly to a period before social media, so it is important to be aware that the methods and impact may be affected by the improved communication channels.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.3 Tackling repeat victimisation

Data shows that homes that have previously been burgled have a much higher risk of being burgled again<sup>21</sup> or in other words that a second incident is more likely than a first and a third is more likely than a second.<sup>22</sup> This phenomenon in which a house is burgled multiple times is known as repeat victimisations or **exact repeats**.<sup>23</sup> However, the heightened risk not only affects the same address but also nearby dwellings, in which case burglaries are known as **near repeats**. The closer in time and space a dwelling is to one that has suffered a burglary, the greater the risk that it too will experience a burglary. As time and space increase, the heightened risk of nearby dwellings decays.<sup>24</sup>

There are two major explanations: the boost and the flag hypotheses. Both are based on the routine activity theory, which states that crime should be explained in terms of the combination of an offender, a suitable target and a lack of guardianship. The first hypothesis states that offenders return to the same neighbourhood because they have learned about opportunities that are present in a given area during an earlier burglary. An offender who has learned of opportunities or vulnerabilities makes a rational decision to return to the area to generate more profit. The second view, the flag hypothesis, states that offenders return to the same area because it has inherent weaknesses which serve as an invitation to offenders. It is most likely that both contribute to the occurrence of near repeats since offenders take advantage of existing vulnerabilities to commit crime.<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to indicate a common time and distance for repeat victimisation as in a comparison of ten cities across five nations, there was some consistency between contexts, but also substantial differences.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, these findings can be used to inform initiatives to reduce burglary, first by identifying those properties that are at risk of repeat burglary and second by acting immediately and implementing one or more of the following tactics<sup>27</sup>: on the one hand, different forms of patrolling or monitoring can be increased, and on the other, the police can attempt to involve both the area's residents and other key actors. First of all, information regarding security precautions such as closing windows and locking doors when leaving the house<sup>28</sup> or repairing and reinforcing entry points, improving locks and lighting<sup>29</sup> can be emphasised when the risk of burglary is likely to be elevated.<sup>30</sup> This approach has great potential, since households are more able and willing to protect themselves more effectively following a first burglary; twenty-five percent of households had at least one security device installed after a burglary.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, the police can notify residents to keep an eye open, implement a neighbourhood watch and ask neighbours to emphasise mutual caretaking.<sup>32</sup> Interventions for repeat victims and those nearby have shown a significant reduction in burglary repeat victimisation<sup>33</sup> without displacement of burglary risks to nearby neighbourhoods.<sup>34</sup> However, the success depends on correct implementation and backup from the police and active participation on the part of the victims.<sup>35</sup>



### BEST PRACTICE: FREE COUNSELLING AND DISCOUNT AGREEMENTS

The police offer for free counselling and discount agreements with insurance companies or banks (loans) in order to support target hardening efforts in Germany can be seen as a good example. Especially since it also gives the opportunity to vulnerable groups (low socio-economic status) to invest in security.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.4 Alley gating

The fourth measure for which strong evidence is available is the use of alley gates. Alley gating refers to the installation of lockable gates, usually made of steel or iron, which restrict entry to an alley or network of alleys. Firstly this burglary prevention measure works by increasing the effort burglars have to take by restricting alley access to legitimate users in possession of a key or passcode and to control access to potential crime targets.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, alley gates increase the risk for offenders, by turning public space into private space. In addition, alley gating may increase natural surveillance from the residents of nearby properties and remove excuses from offenders for being in the area.<sup>38</sup>

A meta-analysis proves that alley gating is a cost-effective burglary prevention reduction measure, albeit with modest effect sizes. In addition, several factors limit the generalisability of these findings such as the fact that the studies used in the meta-analysis all examined British alley gating programmes. However, if practitioners or policymakers want to look into the implementation of alley gating there are a number of guides describing which practical tasks should be carried out in order to create the conditions within which alley gating is more likely to work effectively. Consultation with and consent of residents and commitment to use the gates are some of the practical considerations.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.5 Street lighting

Increasing the levels of illumination on the street or in other public spaces can significantly reduce both crime during the day and at night<sup>40</sup> and fear of crime.<sup>41</sup> There are two main theories about why improved street lighting cause a reduction in crime. The first suggests that improved lighting reduces crime by increasing the likelihood that an offender will be identified. The second suggests that improved street lighting in an area increases community pride and informal control, which can increase the number of people who use an area, and therefore increase the number of potential witnesses to criminal behaviour. The first theory predicts decreases in crime especially during the hours of darkness, while the second theory predicts decreases in crime both during the day and at night.<sup>42</sup>

As with other crime prevention measures, in order to be effective installing street lighting should be targeted<sup>43</sup> and police officers should always ask themselves whether improved lighting is an appropriate response to a crime or disorder problem in a particular neighbourhood or community. A problem-oriented guide is available [from Clarke] to policy makers or practitioners who want to implement increased lighting.<sup>44</sup>



## 03

# MODERATE EVIDENCE

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## 3.1 Targeting repeat offenders

It is a well-documented fact that a minority of active criminals are responsible for a large proportion of crime. Crime control policy has responded to this concentration of criminal offending in a variety of ways: sentencing enhancements on the basis of prior convictions<sup>45</sup> or the establishment of so-called repeat offender projects which pay special attention to the most active burglars in a district based on a defined list. Offenders on that list know they are being watched and will be arrested and put in custody as soon as they commit an offence. At the same time, these prioritised criminals are put in contact with a system that can help rehabilitate.<sup>46</sup> These projects have for example been developed in the Police Districts of Oslo (Very Important Criminal (VIC) project)<sup>47</sup> and Amsterdam (Approach Top600). In Approach Top600 project more than 40 partner organisations from the security, health, youth, probation sectors cooperate. Each person on the list has his/her own case manager who functions as a central point of contact for all involved organisations, develops a personal plan of action and provides support to the person in question.<sup>48</sup>

A recent evaluation of Approach Top600 has shown that this approach results in a decrease of 7% to 45% in the number of domestic burglaries. In addition it has a positive influence on rehabilitation numbers: from the moment the trajectory starts the target group's recidivism decreases by 41%.<sup>49</sup> If the preventive aspect does not work, the last option remains incapacitation. Obviously, a number of studies show that the result can be a significant reduction in burglaries in an area when the most active burglars are being held behind bars for a period of time.<sup>50</sup>

## 3.2 Local publicity

When rolling out a burglary reduction initiative such as Neighbourhood Watch, it is advisable to invest in local publicity. Research into twenty one burglary reduction schemes has shown that (pre-)publicising the existence and objectives of the initiative to the wider community is a relatively straightforward and cost-effective method of enhancing the impact of the crime prevention measure. The mechanism through which this could help cause crime reduction is through communication of information on increased crime reduction activity thereby influencing offender perceptions. The analysis even showed that initiatives that ran a publicity campaign prior to the actual implementation reported that rates of burglary started to fall even before the initiative was rolled out, an effect referred to as an 'anticipatory benefit'. Larger reductions in the number of burglaries can be achieved when stand-alone publicity campaigns (those that ran over some time and that were seen as an intervention in themselves) with sufficient budget are implemented.<sup>51</sup>

As always, it is difficult to identify what will work best in specific situations. Its effect will very much depend upon the context in which you are implementing your campaign. However, there are a few questions that need to be addressed when planning a campaign: Who are the targets? Offenders or victims? Where are the targets? A defined neighbourhood? Or an entire city or country? When will the campaign operate relative to implementation? Constantly or in bursts? Which medium will be used? Newspapers, radio, social media, ...? What message do you want to convey? A general or a specific one? All of these questions will need to be answered during the planning phase.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.3 Property marking

There are sources that suggest that eighty per cent of all thefts and burglaries take place with the purpose of subsequently selling on the stolen goods, or fencing. This implies that without receivers, there would be far fewer thieves, so tackling the handling of stolen goods should also be given priority.<sup>53</sup> There are several anti-fencing measures (see below) but the key measure is to mark property so as to make it more difficult to convert stolen goods into cash or to make their direct use harder. In addition, this measure can help ensure that stolen goods are confiscated and returned to their rightful owner.<sup>54</sup>

Property can be marked by adding the house number and postcode by the use of UV pens, security tags, radiofrequency identification (RFID) devices or microdot solutions (solutions containing a uniquely coded digital signature).<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, mobile phones and tablets also have inbuilt options for remotely blocking them if they are stolen, which makes these devices less valuable and saleable.<sup>56</sup>

Studies from Western Australia and London have shown that property marking is most effective when over 80% of local residents mark their property and if it is carried out in combination with crime prevention advice and publicity.<sup>57</sup>



# 4 LIMITED OR NO EVIDENCE

## 4.1 Alarms

Burglar alarms are assumed to work mainly through deterrence as burglars avoid breaking into houses where they realise that alarms are installed, thereby increasing their risk of being detected and arrested. However, the few existing evaluations from England and Wales have shown contradictory results. On the contrary, installing burglar alarms may actually be counterproductive, as they are associated with an increased rather than a decreased risk<sup>58</sup> of both burglary with entry and attempted burglary.<sup>59</sup> There are several possible explanations for this surprising outcome. One possible explanation is that some burglars are able to find ways of sidestepping or overcoming alarms in order to avoid detection and reduce the risk of being arrested.<sup>60</sup> The quality of the alarm is an important factor in this case. Interviews with convicted burglary offenders confirmed these findings; with the exception of one brand of burglar alarm (ADT), the offenders were not deterred by intruder alarms.<sup>61</sup> Burglars may also realise that thanks to a high rate of false alarms, the police and alarm companies do not immediately respond to an alarm by sending out a patrol, giving burglars time to finish their job and leave. Another possible explanation may be that burglars may interpret the presence of an alarm as an indication that there are valuable goods in the house. Potential benefits may then outweigh the increased risks in their calculations.<sup>62</sup> In addition, an offender's level of experience may influence how alarms are viewed with more experienced offenders perceiving alarms as less of a deterrent than their less experienced counterparts. Another counterargument is the fact that alarms are not cost-effective: they are quite expensive and do not reduce burglary risk. However, evidence from France shows that alarms (on their own and in combination with other security measures) are effective in preventing burglaries against houses but on their own do not protect apartments. Nevertheless, without further insights on specifications and contexts within which alarms fulfil their role, it is not recommended to advise citizens to install burglar alarms as it may give them a false sense of security.<sup>63</sup>



## 4.2 Awareness-raising campaigns

Crime prevention practitioners often opt for awareness-raising campaigns to inform people about crime, thereby hoping to influence their behaviour. A media campaign (including online social media) is one of the elements of the EU-wide Focus Day on domestic burglary. However, research has shown that campaigns which solely focus on knowledge transfer rarely work. On the contrary, they may even increase the fear of crime rather than effectively reduce crime (risk) or harm.<sup>64</sup> In addition, we have not found any evaluations of the impact or outcomes of awareness raising campaigns that focus on domestic burglaries.

However, targeted awareness raising campaigns which are embedded in a holistic approach, which may be developed with the help of this paper, can prove their merit. Especially if the following guidelines are kept in mind. First of all, the message should be to the point, practical and specific. Do not say “Don’t give burglars a chance” but tell people what exactly they can do to help prevent burglaries (for example, having a particular type of door lock installed). Secondly, the medium: a campaign should use the media channels that allow it to reach its target audience. A media agency can support crime prevention workers in this field. Campaigns should also be carefully planned in terms of timing and duration. Repetition (in bursts) is preferable to long-running campaigns. Finally, campaigns should always be part of a broader, coordinated approach to achieving the objective. In order to increase crime reduction, they should meet at least the following two conditions. First, they should concentrate on the emotive and affective aspects of behaviour change in addition to knowledge transfer and awareness-raising. Second, they should accompany and support other approaches to crime prevention (criminal justice, situational, developmental and community prevention), in such a way that they enhance and reinforce one another.<sup>65</sup>

### 4.3 Anti-fencing measures

As mentioned before, there are sources that suggest that eighty per cent of burglaries take place with the purpose of subsequently selling on the stolen goods. The gap between the number of recorded burglaries and recorded incidences of fencing seem to indicate that many cases of fencing are not brought to the attention of the police. From research in the Netherlands, we may assume that the dark number for fencing is high: three percent of Dutch people aged fifteen years and older – over 422,000 people – admit to having occasionally been guilty of fencing. Respondents and experts revealed four circumstances that facilitate the purchase of stolen goods. Firstly, the price difference. Secondly, the ease of buying stolen goods. Thirdly, the relatively low risk of being caught. And finally, the insufficient attention paid to fencing by the police and justice authorities.<sup>66</sup> These findings outline that there is still room for improvement when it comes to reducing the proceeds from burglaries. We have identified several actors which can play a role in this regard.

For a start, **public authorities** can set up databases in which **consumers** can register their own goods preventively, which in the event of theft facilitates reporting and increases the likelihood of retrieving the stolen goods. One step further is the development of a tool, such as StopHeling in the Netherlands, which allows citizens and second-hand buyers to check whether an item has been registered as lost or stolen via a serial number (only unique items can be registered). If this is the case, the police can be notified in order to take action. The counter rose from almost 456,000 search requests 2014 to almost 670,000 in 2015, and in the first quarter of 2016 it has already topped 283,000 (extrapolated to the whole of 2016, this amounts to almost 850,000). In that sense ‘StopHeling’ seems to meet a need among the public and second-hand buyers for checking the reliability of an item they are considering purchasing.<sup>67</sup>

Subsequently, **regulatory authorities** can introduce measures to control the second-hand trade and pawnshops. In Norway, those who want to operate legally in the second-hand trade must therefore apply to the police for a licence. The police can refuse to issue a licence to applicants with criminal records or who are suspected of trading in stolen goods or can withdraw a licence if they have reason to suspect its misuse.<sup>68</sup> In the Netherlands, buyers of second-hand goods have been required since 1880 to register purchased goods (what they buy, when and from whom). Since 2011, a digital variant of this record was developed which is linked to the StopHeling database.<sup>69</sup>

Additionally, the **police** can actively search for stolen goods by periodically checking outdoor markets which are well known for the fact that some stolen goods are sold there.<sup>70</sup> Nowadays, the digital world has a great reach and popularity, offering offenders a new infrastructure for illegal trading. If we want to prevent fencing flourishing away from the limelight, police should also proactively conduct searches online.<sup>71</sup>

At last, **the private sector** can contribute as well. In Norway, professional websites that sell second-hand items can oblige sellers to register in ways that means that they cannot remain anonymous. Manual checks are also performed of everything that is advertised for sale in the “marketplace” and special attention is paid to suspicious adverts. There is an ongoing dialogue with the police about potential stolen goods, and in dubious cases ownership must be documented with receipts.<sup>72</sup> What is more, registering goods makes it possible to link a stolen item to a victim, however the extent to which many citizens adhere strictly to the recommendation to register goods is low, and many mistakes are made when inputting serial numbers. This process should be automated or at least encouraged, as far as possible within a public-private partnership. Finally, there is a need to look into the development of a method for making certain non-unique goods, such as jewellery, unique.<sup>73</sup>

All these measures which make domestic burglaries less profitable by reducing the market for, and market value of, stolen goods are obviously a good idea. Unfortunately, no burglary reduction effect has so far been documented.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, we believe that there is room for improvement and we encourage a thorough evaluation if Member States decide to initiate any of the abovementioned measures.

## 05

## CONCLUSION:

# WHAT WORKS TO PREVENT DOMESTIC BURGLARIES?

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### Target hardening

#### What is it?

The combination of window locks, internal lights, door locks and external lights

#### How it works?

Target hardening makes the target less suitable by increasing the risk and/or increasing the effort involved.



### Neighbourhood watch

#### What is it?

Neighbourhood watch encourages residents to keep their eyes and ears open and call the police if they see or hear something suspicious.

#### How it works?

Setting up a neighbourhood watch scheme makes an area less suitable by increasing the risk and reducing opportunities.



## Tackling repeat victimisation

### What is it?

Properties that are at risk of repeat burglary should be identified in order to increase the implementation of preventive measures such as target hardening or police patrols.

### How it works?

Implementing these measures increases the effort and risk required to commit burglary at identified properties.



## Alley gating

### What is it?

Alley gates prevent offenders gaining access to alleyways.

### How it works?

Installing alley gates increases the effort because burglars are unable to access the target properties or use the alleys as an escape route. Alley gates also increase natural surveillance from the residents, thereby increasing the risk for potential burglars.



## Street lighting

### What is it?

Improved street lighting increases the levels of illumination on the street.

### How it works?

Increasing the level of illumination increases the risk that an offender will be identified by potential witnesses.

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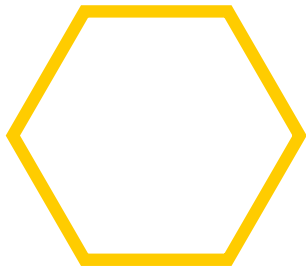
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