

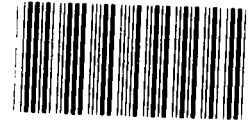
GAO

Report to the Congress of the United States

April 1987

# INS PRE-INSPECTION

## Trial Program at Shannon International Airport



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# EXECUTIVE CORRESPONDENCE

GAO

United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Comptroller General  
of the United States

B-226790

The Honorable George Bush  
The President of the Senate

Dear Mr. President:

Section 208 (b) of the House Joint Resolution 738, Continuing Appropriations, 1987, required that we evaluate the Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) trial pre-inspection program that was conducted at Shannon International Airport in Ireland between July 1, 1986, and October 31, 1986. Under the program, INS inspected U.S.-bound travelers' documents at Shannon rather than at domestic airports to determine such individuals' admissibility to the United States. The resolution required us to evaluate the economic impact of pre-inspection at Shannon on American airports and to determine whether pre-inspection is a cost-effective means of facilitating international air travel and enhancing law enforcement. The Maine congressional delegation also asked us to provide certain information on the pre-inspection program relating to Bangor International Airport.

To evaluate the economic impact of pre-inspection at Shannon on American airports, we interviewed officials from the airlines who participated in the program at Shannon to determine pre-inspection's impact on flight schedules. We did not determine

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**Comptroller General  
of the United States  
B-226790**

April 30, 1987

The President of the Senate and the  
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Section 208 (b) of the House Joint Resolution 738, Continuing Appropriations, 1987, required that we evaluate the Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) trial pre-inspection program that was conducted at Shannon International Airport in Ireland between July 1, 1986, and October 31, 1986. Under the program, INS inspected U.S.-bound travelers' documents at Shannon rather than at domestic airports to determine such individuals' admissibility to the United States. The resolution required us to evaluate the economic impact of pre-inspection at Shannon on American airports and to determine whether pre-inspection is a cost-effective means of facilitating international air travel and enhancing law enforcement. The Maine congressional delegation also asked us to provide certain information on the pre-inspection program relating to Bangor International Airport.

To evaluate the economic impact of pre-inspection at Shannon on American airports, we interviewed officials from the airlines who participated in the program at Shannon to determine pre-inspection's impact on flight schedules. We did not determine the cost-effectiveness of pre-inspection as a means to facilitate international travel and enhance law enforcement because INS should no longer incur additional costs for pre-inspection as a result of a recent change in law. We obtained INS cost estimates for the trial program and future costs of establishing a permanent program. In addition, we discussed the program with INS, State Department, and Department of Transportation officials as well as airline and airport officials. Our objectives, scope, and methodology are discussed in greater detail in appendix I.

It appears that pre-inspection at Shannon had no adverse economic impact on U.S. airports during the trial program since airlines participating in the program said they did not change their flight patterns to take advantage of pre-inspection at Shannon. Officials of airlines which participated in the pre-inspection program said that the factors which they consider in choosing an airport include market demand of passengers and refueling locations. Therefore, pre-inspection did not influence their airport selection.

The pre-inspection program cost about \$351,000 of which about \$51,000 was reimbursable to INS from participating airlines. In addition, the Irish

government paid about \$82,000 for facility modification and support at Shannon for INS' use. We determined that any future programs should be reimbursable to INS through a newly established user fee (section 205, Public Law 99-591) paid by international travelers. Therefore, as designed, the program should not require INS to incur any additional cost.

INS believes that an expansion of the pre-inspection program will result in more detection of inadmissible foreigners to the United States than do its inspections at domestic ports. INS data shows that it detected a higher percentage of inadmissible passengers at pre-inspection ports than at domestic ports. While INS could not provide us complete flight information, its data also show that the percentage of passengers INS detected as being inadmissible on nonpre-inspected flights through Shannon during 1985 was less than that detected on pre-inspected flights at Shannon. These data suggest that the program has the potential for being a more effective means of enhancing law enforcement.

An INS sample of pre-inspected passengers, airlines whose flights were pre-inspected, and Shannon officials favor pre-inspection because of specific benefits each derived from the program. For example, four of the airlines whose flights were pre-inspected at Shannon said that they did not encounter congestion at U.S. airports on arrival.

## General Background on Pre-Inspection

INS administers immigration laws regarding the admissibility of individuals into the United States. In fiscal year 1986, INS inspected 32.6 million travelers through 132 U.S. designated airports of entry. Approximately 6.6 million or 20 percent of these travelers were pre-inspected. As of April 1987, nine airport pre-inspection places<sup>1</sup> existed—six in Canada, one in Bermuda, and two in the Bahamas.

Pre-inspection has been an area of INS' continuing interest since at least 1952.<sup>2</sup> According to INS, pre-inspection augments its law enforcement mission. INS also believes pre-inspection eases congestion at immigration lines at U.S. airports, expedites passenger entry into the United States,

<sup>1</sup>The Department of the Treasury's Customs Service has a preclearance program along with INS and the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services whereby passengers and their baggage are inspected at foreign ports. See appendix II for additional information regarding preclearance. According to an INS official, no foreign country has requested reciprocal preclearance operations in the United States.

<sup>2</sup>INS has not conducted any comparative cost studies on alternatives to pre-inspection.

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and reduces the time aircraft have to spend on the ground waiting for INS to inspect passengers.

Before a decision is made to establish a pre-inspection port, INS evaluates the merits of a potential location. The basic criteria for establishing a pre-inspection location include the support of the host government, contained in a bilateral agreement with the U.S. government; sufficient passengers to warrant the cost of establishing a pre-inspection location; the availability of pre-inspection to all U.S. destined carriers; and concurrence of the State Department. An INS official said INS would not establish pre-inspection at airports in a foreign country where staff would be at high risk due to terrorism.

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## Background on Trial Program at Shannon

In August 1985, the State Department, through its embassies and consuls, asked countries if they were interested in the pre-inspection program.<sup>3</sup> Ireland was the first country to respond favorably to the cable and was selected for the trial program. Continuation of the program requires congressional approval.

INS' trial program at Shannon was staffed with 1 supervisor and 13 inspectors. INS requested volunteers for the program and selected the staff based on supervisors' recommendations. At least 109,175 travelers on 356 flights were pre-inspected during the 4-month trial period which began July 1, 1986. INS could not provide us complete flight information for 3 weeks of the trial program.

A sample of pre-inspected passengers, participating airlines, and the Irish government favored the pre-inspection program at Shannon. Because pre-inspection affects air travel, the Department of Transportation monitored the program and prepared a report which has not been finalized. Its report pointed out advantages and a disadvantage of the program but did not comment on the overall program. (See app. III for additional information on their reaction to the program.)

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<sup>3</sup>The request also included preclearance.

## Economic Impact of the Trial Pre-Inspection Program on American Airports

Since pre-inspection was not a factor used by airlines in their selection of airports, the program did not adversely affect U.S. airports. Six airlines participated in pre-inspection at Shannon. Prior to our evaluation of the trial program, one airline went out of business. The five remaining airlines said that they would not change their flight patterns to take advantage of pre-inspection. The airlines said that market demand is a factor they consider when setting up their routes and two airlines added that changing flights for the purpose of pre-inspection would be too costly.

Because officials at Bangor International Airport in Maine expressed concerns about the possibility of flights being diverted away from intermediate stops at U.S. airports to Shannon, we also asked the airlines using Bangor if pre-inspection was considered in their selection of airports. Based on a Bangor official's identification of international flights that stop at Bangor, we identified four airlines which have regular stops at Bangor. Four other airlines made stops at Bangor but these stops were not regular—about once a year. Two of the four airlines that use Bangor regularly said that market demand is a factor they consider when setting up their routes. One airline said that the ability to fly non-stop was also a factor. Another airline also said fuel prices, the location of an airport en route to a plane's final destination, and customer convenience are the factors it considers in setting up its routes. All four of the airlines said they would not divert flights to take advantage of pre-inspection. Two of the four airlines added that the diversion would be too costly. Moreover, the four airlines said they could not substitute a stop at Shannon for their stop at Bangor, in part, because they need to refuel at Bangor, which is en route to their final destination.

## Cost of Pre-Inspection at Shannon

INS paid about \$351,000 in costs associated with the trial program. Participating airlines reimbursed INS about \$51,000 for INS staff's overtime. In addition to the \$351,000 paid by INS, Shannon spent about \$82,000 on facility modification and support for the INS facility. An INS official estimated that establishing a permanent program at Shannon would result in first-year costs of about \$400,000 and recurring annual costs of about \$270,000. This difference of \$130,000 is due to start-up costs, such as the initial expense of moving INS' inspectors along with their household goods. (See app. IV for more information on program costs.)

If INS establishes a permanent program at Shannon, all of these costs should be reimbursable from a newly established Immigration User Fee Account. Effective December 1, 1986, Public Law 99-591 directed the

Attorney General to charge and collect \$5 per international traveler for immigration inspection.

## Enhancing Law Enforcement

INS believes that its overall law enforcement mission can be enhanced through pre-inspection. INS records show that through pre-inspection, INS detected more inadmissible people at pre-inspection points (.29 percent) than at U.S. airports (.06 percent) during fiscal year 1986. The percentage of passengers which INS identified at Shannon as being inadmissible was .08 or 91 travelers out of 109,175 total passengers. Further, INS said that during 1985 INS identified .03 percent of the passengers as being inadmissible on flights through Shannon.

By detecting unauthorized passengers at their point of origin rather than after they reach the United States, INS believes that it can avoid lengthy and costly detentions, court hearings, and returning individuals to their own country.

INS also believes that terrorists may be deterred from using flights bound for the United States when such flights stop in a country where passengers are pre-inspected.

In order to issue the report by April 30, 1987, as required by the law, we did not obtain official agency comments. However, the contents of the report were discussed with INS and Irish government officials. They agreed with the report message and their comments were considered in preparing the final report. Copies of this report are being sent to the Maine congressional delegation; Director, Office of Management and Budget; INS; the Departments of Justice, Transportation, and State; Bangor and Shannon airports; and other interested parties. Copies will be available to others upon request.

*W. J. Anderson*

*for*

Charles A. Bowsher  
Comptroller General

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## Abbreviations

INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
DOT	Department of Transportation



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# Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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The objectives of our review were to evaluate the economic impact of the pre-inspection program on American airports and to determine whether pre-inspection is a cost-effective means of facilitating international air travel and enhancing law enforcement. As stipulated in the Continuing Appropriations, our review was limited to an evaluation of the trial pre-inspection program that was conducted at Shannon International Airport in Ireland from July 1, 1986 to October 31, 1986. After enactment of the Continuing Appropriations, the Maine congressional delegation<sup>1</sup> asked us to provide additional information about pre-inspection, which we have included in this report.

To determine the economic impact of pre-inspection on American airports, we interviewed officials from (1) five airlines in business at the time of our review and whose flights were pre-inspected at Shannon—Pan American, Delta, Northwest Orient, Aer Lingus, and American Trans Air; (2) American airports receiving the flights from Shannon—New York (John Fitzgerald Kennedy), Atlanta, and Boston; (3) Bangor International Airport; (4) four airlines which stop at Bangor—Flying Tiger, Total Air, Balair, and Skyworld; and (5) airline and airport associations—National Air Carriers' Association, American Association of Airport Executives, Air Transport Association, and Airport Operators Council International, Incorporated. Because of concerns raised by Bangor about the possible impact of pre-inspection on that airport, we included Bangor in our analysis. We also interviewed INS, Customs Service, State Department, and Department of Transportation officials in Washington, D.C.

We did not determine whether pre-inspection is a cost-effective means of facilitating international air travel and enhancing law enforcement because any future program costs should be reimbursable to INS through a newly established immigration user fee. We obtained INS' estimated costs for the trial pre-inspection program at Shannon and its projected costs if it were to establish a permanent program at Shannon. We also obtained and analyzed information on the newly established immigration user fee account and obtained details on the specific pre-inspection costs that would be covered by the user fee. In addition, we obtained and analyzed Shannon, New York, Boston, and Bangor passenger inspection logs for 1985 and 1986, and Atlanta for 1986—the year pre-inspection was operating; and attitudinal surveys that were administered by INS to a sample of pre-inspected travelers. We obtained INS data on the

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<sup>1</sup>Senators William S. Cohen and George J. Mitchell, Representative Olympia J. Snowe, and former Representative John R. McKernan, Jr., now Governor of Maine.

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number of passengers it denied admission to the United States at pre-inspection ports and U.S. airports. We also obtained the Department of Transportation's and the Irish government's evaluation of the trial program.

During the last week of the pre-inspection program at Shannon, we observed the trial program and met with INS and airport officials, members of the Irish government, and officials of airlines which participated in the program.

We did not verify the accuracy of: (1) the INS' inspection data at any of the airports included in our review, (2) program costs, and (3) INS' data on the number of passengers inspected and those denied admission to the United States under the pre-inspection program or at U.S. airports. Our review was conducted between October 1986 and April 1987.

# Preclearance Program

Preclearance is the full inspection of passengers and their baggage at foreign ports by the U.S. federal inspection services—the Department of the Treasury's Customs Service, the Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the Department of Health and Human Service's Public Health Service and the Department of Justice's INS. Currently, there are nine preclearance ports at Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton, and Calgary in Canada; Hamilton in Bermuda; and Nassau and Freeport in the Bahamas. In fiscal year 1986, about 6.6 million international air travelers bound for the United States were precleared. Generally, precleared passengers are eligible for entry into the United States without undergoing any other checks by U.S. federal inspectors at U.S. ports of arrival. At Shannon, however, only immigration inspection was performed, necessitating Customs' inspection at U.S. airports.

According to Customs' officials, with the exception of Shannon, Customs has followed INS' lead in joint efforts to establish overseas inspection ports. Customs is neither presently considering nor planning to expand the number of its overseas inspection ports.

Customs is fully supportive of preclearance in those locations where the traveling public, air carriers, and federal inspection service agencies benefit from such action. However, Customs officials said that while several countries are interested in preclearance, they do not meet one or more of the following preclearance criteria:

- bilateral agreement between the U.S. government and the foreign country that recognizes such conditions as the foreign government providing facilities which meet federal inspection service requirements for inspection;
- airlines' agreement to participate in preclearance and to pay specific reimbursable costs, such as housing and overtime for Customs' inspectors;
- a minimum passenger flow of 365,000 per year; and
- available Customs resources to staff the facility.

**Appendix II  
Preclearance Program**

The following table shows the citizen/alien mix of passengers precleared during fiscal year 1986.

**Table II.1: Citizen/Allen Mix of  
Precleared Passengers for Fiscal Year  
1986**

Port of Entry	Travelers Inspected			Percent of Total	
	Citizens	Aliens	Total	Citizens	Aliens
Calgary	69,743	301,699	371,442	19	81
Edmonton	36,947	133,421	170,368	22	78
Freeport	304,344	85,648	389,992	78	22
Hamilton	427,786	43,036	470,822	91	9
Montreal	338,074	712,241	1,050,315	32	68
Nassau	586,200	208,941	795,141	74	26
Toronto	528,793	1,835,331	2,364,124	22	78
Vancouver	173,975	695,238	869,213	20	80
Winnipeg	53,912	105,657	159,569	34	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,519,774</b>	<b>4,121,212</b>	<b>6,640,986</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>62</b>

# Reactions to Pre-Inspection Program

Pre-inspected passengers, airlines whose flights were pre-inspected, and the Irish government favored the pre-inspection program at Shannon. A sample of pre-inspected passengers who responded to INS' questionnaire reacted favorably to pre-inspection and said that pre-inspection saved them a great deal of time. Based on our discussions, airlines whose flights were pre-inspected at Shannon had a favorable reaction to pre-inspection. The Irish government favors pre-inspection because it believes that, among other things, pre-inspection will enhance Shannon's status as a transatlantic airport. The Department of Transportation's draft study pointed out advantages and one disadvantage of the program.

## Airline Passenger Reactions

INS administered an Air Transport Association questionnaire to a sample of passengers who had participated in the trial program at Shannon. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain the pre-inspected passengers' reaction to the program. We used the results of the questionnaire because it was the only data available on passenger reaction to the program. While the questionnaire suggests an overall favorable reaction to the program, some wording in the questionnaire is biased. For example, one question, "How much time did being inspected by U.S. Immigration in Shannon save you on this trip?" assumes the respondents saved time and the response scale is slanted towards the positive. Therefore, the questionnaire does not provide enough evidence by itself to conclude that most pre-inspected passengers favored the program.

INS distributed about 5,000 questionnaires to Shannon passengers bound for the United States. A total of 528 or about 11 percent of the passengers responded to the questionnaire. We could not determine if this small group of respondents is representative of all passengers pre-inspected at Shannon or how many had previously traveled from Shannon to the United States. The following is a summary of the responses to the questionnaire.

## Characteristics of the Questionnaire Respondents

Of the 528 respondents to the questionnaire, 242 were foreign visitors, 232 were U.S. citizens, 48 were permanent U.S. residents, and 6 were of undeterminable status. Of the respondents, 385 had flown to the U.S. anywhere from 1 to 10 times, 139 had flown more than 10 times, and 4 were unknown. A total of 437 respondents indicated the primary purpose of their trip was a holiday, 53 gave business as the purpose of their trip, 25 said it was for personal matters, and 13 could not be determined.

**Appendix III  
Reactions to Pre-Inspection Program**

**Preferred Method of Inspection**

When asked which type of inspection they would prefer, 414, a clear majority of respondents, said they preferred U.S. Immigration and Customs inspections before boarding an aircraft in a foreign place when destined to the U.S. The next most popular response, involving 72 individuals, indicated that U.S. Immigration before boarding, and U.S. Customs inspection after arrival was preferred. This was the type of inspection tried at Shannon. The following table shows our further tabulations of their responses.

**Table III.1: Preferred Method of Inspection**

Type of inspection	Number	Percent
U.S. Immigration and Customs inspection before boarding an aircraft in a foreign place when destined to the U.S.	414	78.4
U.S. Immigration inspection before boarding and U.S. Customs inspection after arrival	72	13.6
U.S. Customs inspection before boarding and U.S. immigration inspection after arrival	12	2.3
U.S. Immigration and Customs inspection after arrival in the U.S.	9	1.7
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>96.0</b>
Did not answer question	14	2.7
Answer indecipherable	1	.2
Checked more than one response	6	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Time Savings**

Most people answered that the inspection at Shannon saved them "a great deal of time." The following table shows the results of this question.

**Table III.2: Amount of Time Saved by Pre-Inspection**

Amount of time saved	Number	Percent
A great deal of time	328	62.1
Some time	140	26.5
None	29	5.5
Took longer	8	1.5
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>95.6</b>
Did not answer	23	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Choice of Airline Service**

When asked "On your next international trip to the U.S., all other things being equal, would you choose an airline offering Immigration pre-

inspection service over one that did not?," most said yes. The following table shows the results of this question.

**Table III.3: Choose an Airline With Pre-Inspection?**

Type of response	Number	Percent
Yes	402	76.1
No	16	3.0
Doesn't matter	89	16.9
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>96.0</b>
Did not answer	20	3.8
Answer indecipherable	1	.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Airlines' Reaction**

Officials of all five airlines whose flights were pre-inspected at Shannon told us they had a favorable reaction to pre-inspection. Four airlines said that pre-inspection reduced the congestion at the U.S. port of arrival. One added that the program did not result in any flight delays. In addition to these reasons, one other airline also said that pre-inspection resulted in fewer INS fines for having inadmissible aliens on board flights. Airlines carrying inadmissible aliens can be fined by INS if its inspections identify such aliens at the U.S. airport.

**Irish Government Reaction**

We obtained the summary of the Irish government's evaluation of the trial program. In its report, the Irish government said it favored the establishment of a permanent pre-inspection facility at Shannon because, among other reasons, it would enhance Shannon's status as a transatlantic airport.

**Department of Transportation Reaction**

An agreement between the United States and Ireland required an evaluation of the pre-inspection program at Shannon. The Department of Transportation (DOT) conducted this evaluation. In its April 1987 draft report DOT identified various advantages and one disadvantage of the program. The advantages included significant improvements in (1) the facilitation of foreign passengers entry into the United States during the period of the program and (2) INS enforcement. One disadvantage DOT cited was that U.S. citizens arriving at New York and Boston airports may have been delayed on their departure from Shannon during peak pre-inspection periods because at these airports only non-U.S citizens are inspected, whereas in Shannon all passengers were inspected.

# Pre-Inspection Program Costs

INS estimated that the costs for the trial pre-inspection program at Shannon were about \$351,000. Of this, participating airlines reimbursed INS about \$51,000 for overtime. INS estimated the first-year cost for a permanent program at Shannon would be about \$400,000 and recurring annual costs would be about \$270,000. All the costs associated with a permanent program should be reimbursed to INS from the newly established Immigration User Fee Account.

## Trial Program Costs

The criteria in effect at the time of the trial program required airlines to reimburse INS for all overtime and housing allowance costs with the exception of inspector salaries. In addition, the criteria required that the host government provide facilities for passenger processing. As an incentive for airlines to participate in the trial program, INS did not require reimbursement for some of the costs associated with the trial program, such as housing for INS inspectors. Six airlines participated in the program at Shannon (one went out of business).

The following table summarizes INS' costs for the trial program.

**Table IV.1: INS' Costs for the Trial Program at Shannon**

Salaries and per diem	\$224,212
Overtime	51,108
Transportation	16,144
Inspector replacement	20,430
Housing and overhead*	38,759
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>\$350,653</b>
Less reimbursable overtime	51,108
<b>Total net costs</b>	<b>\$299,545</b>

\*Includes about \$12,400 for INS' costs for meetings with airlines to explain the program's advantages, to conduct the opening of the trial program, to negotiate the bilateral agreement with the Irish government, and to complete advanced operational preparation for the trial program (e.g., locate housing for INS pre-inspection personnel).

In addition, Shannon spent \$82,360 on facility modifications and support required by the agreement signed by the U.S. and Irish governments to initiate the trial program.

## Permanent Program Costs

An INS official estimated that establishing a permanent program at Shannon would result in first-year costs of about \$400,000 and recurring annual costs of about \$270,000. In estimating these costs, an INS official assumed it would staff the Shannon port with four permanent



inspectors, one permanent supervisor, and eight intermittent inspectors. All of these costs associated with the permanent program should be reimbursable to INS out of a newly established Immigration User Fee Account.

Section 205, Public Law 99-591, directs the Attorney General, effective December 1, 1986, to charge and collect \$5 per individual for the immigration inspection of each passenger arriving at a port of entry in the United States or for the pre-inspection of a passenger outside the United States, with the exception of Canada, Mexico, and adjacent islands. The "user fees" collected are to be deposited in an Immigration User Fee Account. The law also directs the Secretary of the Treasury to reimburse from the user fee account INS' payments for pre-inspection services for commercial aircraft or vessels. For example, INS payments could include costs for salaries, travel, housing, and education of INS inspectors' dependents.

For fiscal year 1987, INS estimates that its entire inspection expenses will be \$70.4 million. Of this amount, INS plans to spend \$1.5 million for housing and education costs unique to pre-inspection and \$5 million for expansion of pre-inspection to future locations.

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