



Equestrian Medical Safety Association

# EMSA Brings Helmet Questions to American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM)

The following letter was sent to ASTM from EMSA

Dear Committee Members:

The EMSA is an organization of medical and horse people concerned with issues of safety, education and assistance for all folks who enjoy time with horses. Over the past several months the EMSA has been examining some issues relating to helmet design and mild concussion. Through this process we have come to some understandings that lead us to request your attention to three topic areas. Relevant information on the changes in understanding of concussion, the basis for standards of helmet certification and factors influencing routine helmet use are listed below:

### Concussion

Over the past 15 years there has been:

- An explosion of the medical knowledge about concussion
- An increased awareness and information available on concussion in various sports
- The realization that mild concussion may historically have been under-diagnosed
- Recognition that youth and postmenopausal woman may be at increased risk of concussion
- Evidence that active individuals may have had numerous mild conclusions over a lifetime

that increase their risk of more frequent and serious concussion

- Acknowledgement that insufficient emphasis has been placed on the recognition, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mild concussion in sports

### Helmets

A. Standards have been established to scientifically quantify risk reduction

- Historically helmets were designed to give maximum protection for one catastrophic incident
- Collateral protection against other head injury was a bonus
- Current materials and construction have allowed production of a harder (stronger and stiffer) shells
- Impact of the head against the inside if the this shell can result in minor head injury
- The more types of protection a helmet is designed to give; the larger, bulkier and heavier it becomes

B. Helmet use is dependent on:

- Perceived protection
- Comfort
- Appearance
- Requirement by the sport
- Mobility of head and neck
- Impact on visual field

Given the recognition of the likelihood of multiple, mild concussions over a lifetime and the factors influencing helmet

use, there may be a mismatch with the current helmet gold standard of "protection against one catastrophic injury." It is not our intent to criticize that standard or the years of solid scientific and engineering research that has gone into its creation. Rather we seek to open the discussion of a second standard that focuses on the reduction of risk of mild concussion. In today's society, those who exercise are in the habit of having different sets of equipment for different levels of participation. We routinely choose different equipment depending on the task. Why not be able to choose head gear for catastrophic injury when participating in the high risk activities and a smaller, lighter, perhaps more stylish helmet for routine wear?

Our discussions with manufacturers have led us to

believe that they are willing to develop such equipment. However, as this equipment will not meet today's standards, it would unlikely be to be commercially viable. The establishing of international standards has gone a long way to helping the consumer trust the protection given from an approved helmet over one that is not. Our preliminary research indicated that consumers had no idea that the standard was designed for injury reduction in one catastrophic incident. Again, we do not mean to deny the value of a certified helmet in giving protection in less than catastrophic situations.

EMSA wishes to open the discussion about the creation of a standard to reduce the risk of mild concussion. We believe that mild concussion is the most frequently occurring

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## EDITOR'S CORNER

Recently, the horse industry has received a great deal of negative press due to the publicity from serious injuries to high caliber riders and catastrophic injuries to horses resulting in euthanasia in the eventing and racing disciplines. These issues have the general public questioning the equine industry about practices, and have also provided fodder for people and groups that are against any use of horses for sport. These recent tragedies provide the opportunity for the industry to evaluate all aspects of safety for the horse and rider, as well as make an honest evaluation of potential changes that may need to occur. It behooves us as an industry to be proactive, and lead this charge, rather than let other agendas drive this activity.

### Where do we start?

The mission of EMSA, to

provide education, research, and serve as a resource of experience and expertise, has allowed this group to lead the way in providing solid, research based information to the industry.

However, proactive and preventative education is of little value if the information is not put into practice. Aside from the catastrophic injuries, how many folks that were injured during a horse activity when looking honestly at the situation, realize that they knew better...or should have known better? Was it honestly preventable?

I encourage you to go to [www.emsaonline.net](http://www.emsaonline.net), click on "Latest News" and watch the 10-minute "Don't Horse Around with a Bad Attitude" video. I recently had firsthand experience with a student that embodied the "impulsivity" and perhaps a little "invulnerability" and

"macho" attitudes. See if you recognize this scenario:

As the organizer of a large equine event, you can imagine the feeling I had when an ambulance went by the venue and headed to the barns. Just then, my cell phone rang and one of my student demonstration riders called to inform me of the situation. Another student, Suzy\* had been kicked in the head by her horse Butter-scotch\*. She was conscious and aware, but in shock and scared. People were keeping her down and calming her as the ambulance arrived. Both students were very experienced and well trained in safety.

The following details eventually emerged: Suzy left Butter's stall door open while she went to get him some water (she well knew of his mischievous nature). Butter ran out

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Formerly known as the American Medical Equestrian Association/Safe Riders Foundation (AMEA/SRF), the **Equestrian Medical Safety Association (EMSA)** is dedicated to the philosophy, principles and application of safety of people in equestrian activities. This purpose is achieved through education, research and resource.

### MISSION STATEMENT

**EDUCATION** of health care professionals, organization representatives and individuals, including an emphasis on public awareness;

**RESEARCH** to better define injury patterns and risks, efficacy of safety measures and equipment, and assistance in equipment design;

**A RESOURCE** of experience and expertise to be shared and utilized for the benefit of equestrian safety.

## Your EMSA Board is here for you

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# Letter from the President

Dear Fellow Equine Enthusiasts,

The last several months have been busy for EMSA. The website, [emsaonline.us](http://emsaonline.us), was revamped by Mr. Dirk Malavase (Dru's son and a computer guru). Dr. Chuck Crinnian, Ms. Jeffray Ryding and I organized a new safety video. This was spearheaded by Dr. Crinnian (a pilot and a neurologist) as a response to a death sustained during an equestrian activity. This video is now available on the website. It is based on the five personality traits identified to be dangerous in aviation and probably in equine-related activities as well: anti-authority, impulsivity, invulnerability, macho and resignation.

We held our annual meeting December 6-9 at the United States Eventing Association convention in Colorado Springs. Due to the perceived problem with eventing accidents there was a focus on safety. The Saturday G10 Summit was a forum focusing on a number of issues including land conservation and the ICP (Instructor Certification Program). There have since been some serious accidents in eventing, leading to a renewed public furor and an attempt within the equestrian community to address issues and their causes. A combined USEA/USEF safety summit was held in Lexington in June and I attended on behalf of EMSA.

EMSA has formed a special concussion inquiry ad hoc committee chaired by Dr. Pat Maykuth to again address head injuries. The goal of the committee is to interest ASTM in considering a special concussion helmet standard since current ASTM standards provide protection from catastrophic injury but may not have a great effect on the occurrence of milder head injuries. I have joined ASTM on behalf of EMSA and the F08 ASTM committee on sports equipment is taking the issue of concussion under advisement regarding the possibility of improved helmet liners.

Additionally, I have current plans to attend the Equine Extravaganza in North Carolina in July with both a booth and a presentation. The goal is to interest more individuals from varied equine disciplines and activities in the work of our organization. I will also be attending an IMPACT update on sports concussions in Pittsburgh in late July.

Nutrena, one of the USEA convention participants, has a safety video concerning horse handling. I am currently working with them to investigate the addition of a brief EMSA "trailer" to the video once their current ones are no longer available. Several new board members were added in 2007 including Dr. Julia Skains, Dr. Margaret Goodman, Ms. Jennifer Bodtman (who recently resigned due to family illness), and Ms. Beth Lendrum. Dr. Skains is a veterinarian, Dr. Goodman is a psychologist with long-standing boxing involvement, and Ms. Lendrum is very experienced and well-known to the eventing community. Leaving the board with many thanks from EMSA is Ms. Eve Flanigan who produced the newsletter. She will be temporarily replaced by Dr. Betsy Greene.

Sincerely yours,  
Debbie Stanitski

## EMSA Bios



**Deborah F. Stanitski, M.D.**  
EMSA President

Debbie is the current President of Equestrian Medical Safety Association, formerly known as the American Medical Equestrian Association/Safe Riders Foundation ([www.emsaonline.us](http://www.emsaonline.us)). The mission of this 501c(3) organization is to research and promote safe equine practices and serve as an aid resource to those injured during equine pursuits. Although the organization was founded by medical doctors with an interest in horse activities including eventing, the goal of the organization is to promote horse and human safety in all equestrian disciplines and activities.

Debbie is an eventer and a retired pediatric orthopedic surgeon. A closed head injury, sustained while hunting, resulted in her becoming a non-operating orthopedist and becoming more concerned about rider safety. After two years in therapeutic riding and relearning how to drive and trailer, Debbie returned to riding and competing on her own horse.

Debbie and her husband are currently retired from clinical practice. Her other "occupation" is the organization of her 35<sup>th</sup> Smith College reunion.

## EDITOR'S CORNER

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the back of the barn, Suzy ran after him (she also knew better than to chase him). Then she grabbed the back of Butter's blanket "to stop him" (she really knew better!). Suzy got kicked just below the temple.

Final Outcome: A very lucky young lady with bruising and a headache, no concussion

Final Verdict: The injury was completely preventable at a minimum of three places during this scenario. But, being right or knowing better would not have given anyone satisfaction if the kick had been a few inches higher and potentially fatal.

\*Names were changed.

I hope that you'll find the information in this newsletter useful, and you will become aware of what types of questions are being asked/addressed by the EMSA and ASTM groups regarding helmet issues.

Take care and be safe!  
Betsy Greene, Ph.D.  
Editor

# Summary of the USEF/USEA Safety Summit

DR. DEBBIE STANITSKI

On behalf of EMSA, I attended the USEF/USEA Safety Summit on June 7 and 8, 2008 in Lexington, Kentucky. This summit was initiated by Mr. Kevin Baumgardner (USEA president) and Mr. David O'Connor (USEF president). The meeting was facilitated by a global firm previously used by the USEF. The chief facilitator had previously worked with Mike Wallace on *Sixty Minutes*.

The main reason for the summit was the perceived recent increase in eventing injuries highlighted by Ralph Hill, Darren Chiacchia and, most recently, Laine Ashker. Mr. O'Connor's initial statement of the goal was a reduction in horse falls. He quoted statistics that indicate if a rider fell alone, the incidence of rider injury was 2% whereas if the horse and rider fell together this increased to 50% and increased further to 85% if rotation was involved. He stated that he desired safety solutions that were both feasible and effective.

Unfortunately, the Saturday morning sessions concerning course design and veterinary/medical issues ran concurrently. I attended the latter although both have been promised to be available on the USEF website. The veterinary/medical panel consisted of Drs. Catherine Kohn and Kent Allen (veterinarians), Dr. Tracey Corey (Louisville medical examiner) and Mr. Mike Pilato (athletic trainer).

The equine topics discussed were the nature of injuries sustained in rotational falls, pulmonary hemorrhage,

competitor age, and the "long" vs. the "short" format. Human issues included safety equipment, fitness, "return to play" guidelines, and hard data acquisition.

Saturday afternoon qualifications and education were covered sequentially. The qualification panel members were Leslie Law, Robert Costello and John Staples. Topics discussed included the levels at which qualifications should exist, rider age, inconsistencies with the FEI, possible loss of qualifications as the result of a fall, competency and the professional versus the amateur.

The subsequent education session panel was Gretchen Butts (nurse, 4-star competitor), Malcolm Hook (USEF Technical Committee Chairman, stable owner, TD, and trainer) and Karen O'Connor (Olympic Team medalist and team member since the 1980s, Pan Am Games winner, ICP co-founder and USEF board member). Topics included coach certification, ICP impediments, rider licensing and rider responsibility, and horsemanship.

On Sunday David O'Connor initiated the final session by suggesting that experience may need to be replaced by education. The current thinking needs to be changed so that riders cannot blame something or someone else and need to be responsible for their own decisions and subsequent actions. The message was that one must take care of his or her own horse.

The facilitators listed the general problems as being institutional (research, data,

funding) individual (competency, fitness, responsibility, education) and "cultural." In terms of research, Dr. Kohn described the need for cardiopulmonary function research. The issue of fence construction was added when David O'Connor stated that he had budgetary approval for "all the frangible pins anyone wants" but emphasized that this cannot be construed as free reign to race over objects just because they will give way if hit. As to the speed between complexes, John Staples is completing GPS technology to assess this. There is interest regarding how exertion affects rider concentration and decision-making ability, and how one does objectively assess rider and horse fitness.

With respect to data collection, there will be an immediate review of and changes to existing forms. The goal of computerizing this data will be undertaken to allow better dissemination of information as well as better data management. David O'Connor stated that the USEF would fund all horse necropsies and list suitable facilities for this on their website.

It was stated that funding was needed for research, veterinary and human studies and the ICP program. The impediments to certification have been both time and money. With respect to competency, there was discussion of a point system versus licensure. Furthermore, qualifications will be linked to a horse-rider pair. Rider fitness standards and recommendations to achieve them as well as appropriate exercises will be forthcoming. The

role of certified coaches is to be elucidated. Rider responsibility includes improved horsemanship as well as an increased awareness of what one is riding at any given time. Immediately, a "watch list" will be developed by the USEA designed to alert organizers to those individuals who have been having difficulty. Elimination during cross country in two events will immediately place one on this list. There was great discussion about the new "one fall and you are out" rule with the point being made that not all separations of horse and rider are the same.

Trainer/coach/instructor certification was recommended. It was suggested that a non-certified coach not be allowed in the ring. More ICP awareness programs are to be developed. More people are to be trained on the installation of frangible pins. A horse medical card was suggested.

In summary, there were a huge number of issues both equine and human. The current plan is a collation and assessment of all remarks with the subsequent development of both short- and long-term recommendations by the USEF and the USEA.

# Kentucky International Equine Summit

Dear EMSA members,

April 28-29, I was fortunate to attend the Kentucky International Equine Summit held in Lexington. The meeting was the first ever held and had three simultaneous tracks: wellbeing of the competitive horse, the emerging science of horse breeding, and the equine economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Speakers were not confined to racing and included David O'Connor (President, USEF) and John Long (CEO, USEF).

As my interests lie in equine safety, I remained in the first track. U.S. and international speakers included those working at prominent veterinary research institutions, as well as those working in the private sector. Topics included equine exercise physiology, shoeing, improved treatment and identification of orthopedic injuries, dehydration and fluid balance, pathophysiology of injuries, stem cell research, and surface technologies.

To me, it was sadly ironic and frustrating that despite all

the well-versed compassionate participants, we had the devastating injuries at Rolex and at the Kentucky Derby.

More questions were raised than answered, but it was comforting to see all the research being conducted in an effort to improve equine safety and prevent injuries that will in turn promote rider safety. Boxing, in contrast, conducts little or no research, and those working in the sport rarely donate money to improve safety standards.

The conference offered a complete DVD of the proceedings, and I highly recommend attending the conference next year for those of you who compete in any equine endeavor. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the DVD log on to: [www.kyequinesummit.com/](http://www.kyequinesummit.com/).

—MARGARET GOODMAN, MD

*Neurologist and Former Chief Ringside Physician and Medical Advisory Board Chairman for the Nevada State Athletic Commission*

# A Rolex Perspective

DR. DEBBIE STANITSKI

I was fortunate to have attended the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event, April 24-27, 2008. As usual the event was exciting and an example of the ultimate in eventing. Phillip Dutton finally overcame his “jinx” to win the event, having won almost everything else at one time or another.

Unfortunately there were some serious mishaps for both horses and riders which, not surprisingly, occurred on the cross-country course Saturday, April 26. As a result, two horses were euthanized and four riders had falls. One of them was airlifted to an area hospital with multiple rib fractures, a collapsed lung, a clavicle fracture and a scapular fracture. Fortunately there were no deaths or cases of severe head injury or paralysis.

As usual, there has already been and will continue to be

much speculation as to the contributory causes to these events. There are those who will condemn the sport of eventing which, like all equine pursuits, carries inherent risk. There are those who will blame speed, the nature of the fences, or combination, etc. The bottom line is that the safety of the rider and of the horse must be foremost in everyone's mind. In eventing, as in some other disciplines, there has been a major push to assess injuries and their causes. It behooves all disciplines from dressage to barrel racing to not only assess the potential for injuries and actual injuries themselves, but to minimize the risks for injury when at all possible. Obviously, one cannot control erratic horse behavior, but there are issues one can easily address with certain standard practices.

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## EMSA Brings Helmet Questions to American Society for Testing and Materials International (ASTM)

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riding-related head injury. And, over a lifetime, multiple mild concussions may be as debilitating as one catastrophic head injury. The goal is to give the rider the choice of a comfortable, stylish alternative which they might choose to wear each time they put a foot in the stirrup. We do not seek to get riders out of helmets that meet

today's standard. Rather, we want to get riders of all horses used to the idea of a helmet to be as essential a part of equipment as the saddle or bridle.

To do this, we need a cooperative effort from you who set the standards, the designers and manufacturers, and the medical and research communities. As information about head injury progresses, EMSA

would like to help facilitate the types of discussions that would incorporate improvements in design and manufacturing and would result in products that keep pace with this knowledge. This will aid us in our educational efforts within the horse community. We believe this will enhance the goals of the creators of the standards, the producers of the equipment, as well as those who buy helmets.

That goal is to get quality, approved, protective head gear to be a part of every ride.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. EMSA looks forward to your leadership in this process and would be happy to participate where appropriate.

Sincerely

Deborah F. Stanitski, M.D.  
EMSA President

# Current Topics at ASTM Meetings, May 2008

DRU MALAVASE

EMSA's letter regarding a possible new equestrian helmet standard aimed specifically at concussion was circulated a week before the meeting to all the members of F08.53, the helmet subcommittee. Non-members attending who hadn't gotten it by email were given a copy before the meeting. Its content was first discussed in the Equestrian Headgear Task Group, with 15 members attending. We had two helmet manufacturers (one equestrian, one ski), one helmet designer, several materials suppliers, three racing experts from California including a jockey and a risk manager from AIG insurance, a representative of the Consumer Products Safety Commission, three test lab engineers, and one EMSA member (reporting.)

The Task Group members were in agreement about the desirability of a helmet which could better manage concussion, but it was the consensus of the group that writing a standard offering less protection from catastrophic head injury than the current F1163 would not be in the best interest of riders, since it is impossible to predict the vulnerability of any particular rider nor to anticipate the severity of a blow to which that rider might be exposed. However, there are two possibilities for improving the current products to minimize damage from both high and low impacts. The first would be by the use of multi-density liners, which would place softer density foam closest to the head. The second would be to use a completely different kind of liner which is not yet available but is in development. This material is said to have the potential to "sense" the power of incoming energy and adjusting to absorb it even if it is a low level impact. The committee agrees that Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (MTBI) is important and would welcome the offered assistance of EMSA in two areas.

First, both the Equestrian Task Group and the Helmet Shirtsleeves Group encourage interested EMSA members at the November ASTM meeting in Miami, since all opinions are honored and addressed. At this meeting's Shirtsleeves session we had our first report on low impact performance

by currently available helmets from several disciplines, and by the time of the next meeting there will be similar testing completed on samples of equestrian helmets. We are just beginning to understand how individual the threshold of concussion is, with variables including past head injury, age, general physical condition, location of impact, and a possible variety of other causes. Equestrian is, by no means, the only group interested in low impact concussions. All sports are fortunate that the Task Group working on this question includes the most outstanding testing experts in the U.S. and in particular, Dr. David Thom, who heads the group.

Other presentations at the Shirtsleeves meeting came from P.D. Halstead of Southern Impact Research in Knoxville, TN. His lab has been working on the knotty problem of rotational injuries and is testing with a different type of head form which has an attached biofidelic neck. Halstead has had input from the great names in head injury research; Ommaya, Generalli, and the Wayne State lab where the initial cadaver head research was done.

Rick Greenwald of Simbex and Dartmouth is the originator of the HITS system which instruments helmets with sensors which can be read on the sidelines of various sports so that trainers can remove and assess athletes who have taken a blow to the head. There has been a variety of studies (peer reviewed) of the thousands of impacts which have been recorded, and recently the National Institutes of Health gave the program a large grant to expand the areas of study. Thanks to the Irish Racing industry and Charles Owen Company 12 steeplechase jockeys in Ireland have been fitted with instrumented helmets and are currently being studied. There are video cameras at each fence so that it will be possible to study the mechanics of rider falls and correlate them with the severity of head blows. This is the first application of the system to an equestrian sport.

The second area where the committee felt that EMSA might be of help was in identifying MD experts on head injury who

could bring some new ideas to the table and who have not already been approached by anyone on the ASTM committees.

The third area which is of great interest would be for EMSA members who are involved with the various horse organizations to try to persuade their sports to require in-depth reporting of head injuries INCLUDING THE MAKE, MODEL AND AGE of the participants' helmets. Because this has been closely guarded information in the past the only way we know about specific model performance is through the few companies who share that data. This is an idea requested by Dr. Hammett when the AMEA was founded, and we are still no closer to getting this crucial information.

However, since it appears that there will be a new Consumer Products Safety Commission equestrian helmet standard in the next couple of years, this is information we may see developed eventually. Rick McCallion of the CPSC advised us that the scope of H.R. 4040 is so broad that it will likely be some time before Section 41 on Equestrian Headgear gets implemented. (They will be dealing with toxic substances, toys, imports, etc. first since they are considered greater hazards and will get a higher priority in this cash-strapped agency.) It was agreed in all three committees involved, the EQ Task Group, F08.53 (Sports Helmets) and F08 (Sports Equipment) that there can be some advantages to CPSC reviewing F1163 and possibly adding to it, especially if the two problem areas can be fixed before it passes into law.

To that end the Co-Chairs of EQ wrote a letter requesting the Senators who are working on harmonizing the bills in both houses to make two changes. The first would allow updates to both the interim (F1163) and new CPSC standards without the necessity for further legislation. (This has been a real failing in the CPSC bicycle standard.) The second would remove the proposed definition of an equestrian helmet to include a "hard shell" without specifying what is meant by the term. Since we know that the ultra light non-hard shell helmets

are the most popular, most used, and least expensive on the market, it would be a catastrophe for consumers and disciplines like Endurance to be denied their availability. Our letter has proposed language which would remove that possibility. The letter will be sent out with the signatures of the Chairs of F.08 and F.08.53, and a similar letter will be prepared by the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, thanks to their lawyer who is a member of F.08.53. Dru Malvasse was designated as the ASTM member contact in case of any questions from the senators or their staffs.

Roy Burek, Co-chair of the EQ Task Group presented two of his company's helmets for study. The first belonged to Laine Ashker, recently severely injured in a rotational fall at Rolex. This helmet showed near-maximum compression on both sides of the head, and it is remarkable that a TBI was not one of her injuries. The second helmet belonged to a female Irish Steeplechase Jockey who fell after a fence in a race and a following horse literally stepped on the back of her helmet, cracking it about four inches up from the bottom near the center line at the back of her neck. The force of that impact broke off the plastic buckle at the front of the helmet, but it stayed in place. She had bruises fore and aft, and at the front of her neck, but rode (and won) in the

next race on the card wearing a borrowed helmet.

The committee continued previous discussion on the pros and cons of stiffer shells on helmets, and addressed a letter from Dr. Timms of Troxel, who has been analyzing crush injuries in riders. The latest study from the UK estimates that 15% of equestrian injuries involve crush to some part of the body. Two methods of measuring crush resistance in helmets were discussed, and one will be chosen and incorporated in the ASTM base helmet standard F1446, at which time F1163 will be modified to include it.

There is a new body protector standard for equestrian racing, with both Tipperary and Charles Owen bringing examples to the meeting. The Owen has a new type of gel foam which is light, ventilated, and much more body-compliant than previous types.

These are just some highlights from a day and a half of meetings, and as usual I was impressed with the cooperation and transparency shown by committee members who are also competitors. I was honored to receive the committee's recognition for 24 years of membership, and am looking forward to another valuable meeting in November.



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your  
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ACTIVITY OF INTEREST (Eventing, recreation, pony club, 4-H, reining, roping, endurance, emergency response, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

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