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| ONR Report  International Collaboration on New Reactor Designs – Quarterly Update July 2025 |



ONR Report

International Collaboration on New Reactor Designs – Quarterly Update July 2025

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# Introduction

In accordance with our strategic framework for international engagement (Ref. 1), we are committed to collaborating with international regulatory bodies to align approaches to small modular reactors (SMRs) and advanced modular reactors (AMRs). We believe there are significant benefits in collaboration on reactor design assessment, including greater harmonisation and facilitating global deployment of standard designs, and reducing the burden on industry through lower costs and streamlined processes. We have taken a proactive and leading role in this through our work with key international bodies such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), as well as bilateral and multilateral engagement with international regulatory bodies.

As part of our openness and transparency agenda we will provide quarterly updates on our work with international regulators in the new reactors area. The first quarterly report was published in March 2025; this is the second report.

# Key relationships

## Bilateral engagement

We have formal information exchange arrangements in place to facilitate international co-operation with the nuclear safety regulators in a number of countries with civil nuclear power programmes. The full list of agreements is available on our [website](https://www.onr.org.uk/working-with-others/agreements-with-others/). Some of the key relationships for our work on SMRs and AMRs are with the:

* US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC);
* Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC);
* French L’Autorité de Sûreté Nucléaire (ASN) ;
* Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority of Finland (STUK)
* Japanese Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA).

Where we are assessing reactor designs concurrently with other regulators, or are assessing a design that has previously been reviewed by an established nuclear regulator, we will seek to leverage these relationships to accelerate our process, establish common regulatory positions to facilitate global deployment of new reactor designs and bring about cost and schedule benefits for reactor vendors and developers where possible.

## ONR/ NRC/ CNSC memorandum of cooperation

In March 2024 we signed a trilateral memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with the US NRC and CNSC (Ref. 2) to collaborate on the assessment of SMRs and AMR designs. This agreement is a key enabler for the sharing of technical knowledge and judgments to facilitate streamlined regulation.

Terms of reference (Ref. 3) were signed in January 2025, to define administrative and governance arrangements and to facilitate establishment of a programme of work for specific activities under the MoC. Activities under the MoC are coordinated by a committee which is jointly chaired by representatives of all three regulators.

The MoC does not change the national regulatory or legal regime of each country or fetter regulatory decision making. The participants acknowledge the differences in each country’s regulatory frameworks and processes, while seeking to align approaches and expectations as far as possible.

## SMR regulators’ forum

The SMR regulators’ forum was established in 2014 under the auspices of the IAEA. The forum provides an opportunity for discussion among member states and other stakeholders to share regulatory knowledge and experience, with the objective of enhancing nuclear safety by identifying and resolving common issues that may challenge regulatory reviews of SMR designs. We currently undertake the role of vice-chair of the forum, with NRC as the chair.

In November 2017 the forum established working groups in the areas of licensing, design and safety analysis, manufacturing, commissioning and operations. These groups continue to the present day. The forum has published several reports which can be found on its [website](https://www.iaea.org/topics/small-modular-reactors/smr-regulators-forum).

## IAEA nuclear harmonisation and standardisation initiative

We have supported the regulatory track of the [IAEA nuclear harmonisation and standardisation initiative](https://nucleus.iaea.org/sites/smr/SitePages/Nuclear-Harmonization-and-Standardization-Initiative.aspx) (NHSI) since its inception in 2022. The goal of the NHSI regulatory track is to develop harmonised regulatory approaches between national regulatory bodies that would enable the effective global deployment of safe and secure advanced nuclear reactors.

At the start of phase 1 the regulatory track established three working groups:

* Working group 1, tasked with developing an international framework for licensing/ pre-licensing information sharing;
* Working group 2, tasked with developing a process and reference framework for multinational pre-licensing regulatory reviews; and
* Working Group 3, tasked with developing a processes that will enable regulators to share review findings and collaborate on regulatory assessments.

Over the past year our activity on NHSI has principally focused on supporting working group 3 (WG3), phase 1 of which was established to develop guidance on how a design review conducted by a mature regulatory body could be leveraged by a regulatory body in another country. During phase 2 the activity of the group is focused on developing practical guidelines for developing a regulatory cooperation toolkit. We have continued to contribute to the group’s activities, including the development of tools for categorising information and the population of the Cooperation Hub.

A security working group has been established for phase 2 and has held one virtual meeting in April and one in-person meeting in June. At these meetings terms of reference have been agreed, and the deliverables that will be produced by the working group have been established.

## NEA working group on new technologies

The working group on new technologies (WGNT) is one of the five working groups under the Committee on Nuclear Regulatory Activities (CNRA). CNRA is responsible for the NEA regulatory activities that support nuclear safety with emphasis on future nuclear reactors. The WGNT focuses on the regulatory approaches to ensure safety of new technologies deployed or being considered for deployment. The aim of the group is to share information, develop common understanding and explore opportunities for harmonisation. We currently chair the group, with good representation from NEA member countries.

There are two task groups currently operating under WGNT: control and instrumentation (C&I) and structural integrity. Two new task groups were approved in December 2024: lessons learned from nuclear construction and regulatory approaches to non-electric applications of nuclear energy.

# Ongoing projects

## Generic design assessment

### Rolls-Royce SMR

In March 2022, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy asked ONR, the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to begin a three-step Generic Design Assessment (GDA) for Rolls Royce SMR Ltd's 470MW SMR design. The 12-month step 1 to agree the scope and schedule for future technical engagements commenced in April 2022 and successfully concluded March 2023. In April 2023, the regulators started a 16-month assessment of the fundamental acceptability of the Rolls-Royce SMR design for deployment in Great Britain. In July 2024, the regulators issued a Step 2 GDA statement (Ref. 4) and Rolls-Royce SMR entered Step 3 of the GDA process. More information can be found on our [website](https://www.onr.org.uk/generic-design-assessment/assessment-of-reactors/rolls-royce-smr/).

During GDA we have extended invitations to five European nuclear safety regulators to observe our routine GDA interactions with Rolls-Royce SMR Ltd: STUK; the Polish National Atomic Energy Agency (PAA); the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority (SSM); the Dutch Authority for Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection (ANVS); and the Czech State Office for Nuclear Safety (SÚJB).This is the first time in the history of GDA that our work has been observed by other regulators and it aims to build knowledge, promote harmonisation and bring about efficiency benefits should design assessments subsequently be taken forward in those countries.

In April 2025 Rolls-Royce SMR Ltd submitted an engagement plan to US NRC for its technology to be considered by the US regulator. We stand ready to support NRC in this endeavour to maximise the learning from our assessment to date.

### GE-Hitachi BWRX-300

In January 2024, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) asked ONR, the Environment Agency and NRW to begin a two-step GDA for GE-Hitachi’s BWRX-300 reactor. Step 1 successfully concluded in December 2024, whereupon the regulators started step 2 which is expected to conclude in December 2025.

In April 2022, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and Ontario Power Generation (OPG) announced plans to jointly work to help develop and deploy the BWRX-300 design in the United States and Canada. Since March 2023 NRC and CNSC have been engaged in cooperative work on regulatory and safety issues in their respective licensing reviews of the BWRX-300.

We have continued to increase our participation in these joint regulatory engagements, ranging from one-off meetings for information exchange to observation of regulatory interactions with GE-Hitachi and TVA/ OPG. This helped to build our knowledge and target our effort appropriately.

The willingness of NRC and CNSC to share their evaluations of aspects of the BWRX-300 with us has significantly benefited our assessment activities. Notable examples include a joint review by both regulators on the advanced construction techniques, CNSC’s detailed review of the claimed reliability of the reactor’s diverse shutdown systems, and a presentation by the reactor vendor to all three regulators on the BWRX-300 C&I design.

Collaboration between the three regulators is facilitated by the tripartite MoC, however the technology vendor and utilities are engaged in setting the direction and monitoring the progress of collaboration. A six-party grouping has been established involving the regulators, GE-Hitachi, TVA and OPG, with PAA and the Polish developer Orlen Synthos Green Energy (OSGE) observing. This group meets twice a year, both at a ‘working level’ and at CEO-level, bringing the most senior representatives of the respective organisations together to bring focus and prioritisation to international activities on the BWRX-300. The next CEO level meeting has been arranged to coincide with the IAEA General Conference in September 2025.

### Holtec SMR-300

In June 2023 DESNZ requested ONR, the Environment Agency and NRW to undertake a two-step GDA for Holtec International’s SMR-160 reactor design. Prior to commencement of GDA, Holtec implemented a design change to increase the reactor power from 160MW electrical to 300MW electrical, resulting in the design being rebranded the SMR-300. GDA step 1 successfully completed in July 2024 (Ref. 5), with step 2 expected to complete in March 2026.

In August 2022 Holtec International began pre-application engagement with NRC over its plans to construct two SMR-160 (now SMR-300) units at the Palisades site in Michigan. Those engagements are continuing ahead of Holtec’s planned submission of a construction permit application in late 2026; these timescales go beyond the expected duration of GDA.

In August 2020 CNSC completed phase 1 of its vendor design review (VDR) process on the SMR-160. However, there has been no engagement between Holtec and CNSC since then and Holtec is not currently pursuing any plans to deploy the SMR-300 in Canada.

We will be the first regulator to make a formal judgement on the adequacy of the SMR-300 design. There is therefore limited opportunity for collaboration during GDA, although our work could bring about efficiencies in other jurisdictions should design assessment be taken forward.

We are engaged in regular discussions with NRC and have reviewed its regulatory engagement plan with Holtec and observed a number of engagements between Holtec and NRC on matters of relevance to GDA, which has helped develop our understanding of the SMR-300 design. In April 2025 NRC observed a GDA technical engagement in the C&I topic area, and has expressed an interest in further collaboration on this topic.

As part of its ambitions to deploy the SMR-300 in multiple countries Holtec has expressed an interest in ONR engaging with other national regulators to exchange information on respective approaches and to share the findings of our ongoing assessment of the design. As the project progresses towards completion we will engage with Holtec to explore these opportunities.

## Other activities

### Advanced Modular Reactor research, development and demonstration programme

Since 2022 we have been providing support to the DESNZ AMR research, development and demonstration (RD&D) programme. The programme aims to demonstrate high-temperature-gas-cooled reactor (HTGR) by the 2030s, as well as developing coated particulate fuel CPF technology required for HTGRs and other AMR technologies.

As part of our work in this programme we have engaged with the Japanese NRA to share our regulatory approaches and to learn from NRA’s experience of regulating construction and operation of a HTGR facility, including NRA’s approach to assessment of reactor designs. We have also observed engagements between CNSC and NRC to establish a common regulatory position on the qualification of CPF (Ref. 6). These engagements helped develop our understanding of this novel technology and informed our support to the AMR RD&D programme.

### Engagement with Hungarian Atomic Energy Authority

In January 2024 we signed an information exchange agreement with the Hungarian Atomic Energy Authority (HAEA) (Ref. 7). Under this agreement we are working with HAEA and the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) to explore opportunities for greater engagement with HAEA on assessment of new reactor designs.

In April 2025 we supported the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) at the bilateral ‘Chain Bridge Forum’ between the UK and Hungary, participating in a panel discussion on Hungarian-UK nuclear collaboration. This included a bilateral engagement with HAEA where we identified candidate topics for potential future collaboration.

# Potential future projects

## Westinghouse AP300

In August 2024 we received a request from DESNZ to undertake a two-step GDA on Westinghouse Electric Company LLC’s AP300 design. At the time of writing this report we are awaiting confirmation from Westinghouse of its readiness to commence GDA.

Since May 2023 Westinghouse has been engaged in pre-application activities with NRC ahead of an expected application for design certification of the AP300. Westinghouse has indicated that it intends to provide GDA submissions to UK regulators in parallel with submissions to NRC; this is expected to yield significant opportunities for collaboration and result in efficiencies for regulators and Westinghouse. We also expect there will be opportunities to leverage previous assessment work undertaken by ourselves and NRC on the Westinghouse AP1000 design, on which Westinghouse claims the AP300 is based.

## Last Energy

Last Energy has been participating in our early engagement framework since May 2024, through which we have been providing regulatory advice to inform its plans to develop and deploy PWR-20 microreactors in Great Britain. In January 2025 Last Energy entered the nuclear site licensing process pre application phase as it intends to obtain a nuclear site licence to construct and operate four PWR-20 units at the Llynfi site in South Wales. The PWR-20 has not been through the GDA process and so we will undertake assessment of the design in parallel with licensing of the corporate body (Ref. 8).

As of February 2025, Last Energy is progressing pre-application activities with the NRC relating to the sites for which it intends to apply for an early site permit (ESP) in June 2025.

As Last Energy progresses through the nuclear site licensing process in GB, including design assessment of the PWR-20 on a site-specific basis, we will engage Last Energy and the NRC where we find opportunities for information exchange and collaborative assessment of the design that would realise efficiencies in either jurisdiction.

## Newcleo

In June 2025 we received a request from DESNZ to undertake a two-step GDA on Newcleo’s LFR-AS-200 design. At the time of writing this report we are engaging with Newcleo to establish cost recovery arrangements and agree a project schedule.

In June 2024 Newcleo completed the ‘preparatory phase’ of ASN’s licensing process regarding its plans to construct a 30MW demonstration facility in France, which it hopes will be operational by 2030.

When we start the GDA we will engage with ASN to identify opportunities for information exchange and collaboration on Newcleo’s reactor design.

## TerraPower

In November 2024 we commenced early engagement with TerraPower LLC regarding proposals to deploy its Natrium sodium-cooled fast reactor technology in Great Britain. From May 2025 we are engaging with Terrapower through a series or technical and process workshops (tier 2 Early Engagement) covering the Natrium design and the UK regulatory pathways. The workshops are due to conclude in August 2025. Through these engagements TerraPower has signalled an intention to apply for a GDA on the Natrium design.

In March 2024 TerraPower submitted a construction permit application to the NRC for construction of a single Natrium reactor at the Kemmerer Power Station in Wyoming. TerraPower has previously undertaken pre-application engagement with NRC since October 2021. In July 2025, the USNRC notified Terrapower that the application review duration for the company’s Construction Permit Application (CPA) relating to the first Natrium plant, Kemmerer Unit 1 has been reduced from a 26-month review to a 19-month review. The anticipated date for the final environmental impact statement (EIS) and safety evaluation for the CPA is end of December 2025.

Should TerraPower be successful in any future GDA application we will engage with NRC to collaborate on the assessment of the Natrium design.

## X-Energy

In March 2025 we commenced early engagement with X-Energy LLC on its proposals to deploy its Xe-100 high temperature gas reactor in Great Britain. At the time of writing this report July 2025, ONR has agreed a programme of process and technical workshops (tier 2) early engagement with X-Energy, scheduled for September and October 2025. Through earlier tier 1 engagements X-Energy signalled an intention to apply for a GDA on the Xe-100 design.

X-Energy has been engaged in pre-application activities with NRC since September 2018, and in January 2024 the Xe-100 completed phases 1 and 2 of CNSC’s vendor design review process. Should any future GDA application be successful we will engage with NRC and CNSC to exchange information relating to the Xe-100 and explore opportunities for collaborative assessment of the design.

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# Recent activity

Table 1 sets out our recent international regulatory engagements on SMRs and SMRs for the period April – July 2025.

Table 1: International engagement from April – July 2025

| Programme | Date | Activity | Outcomes |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| GE-Hitachi BWRX-300 | April 2025 | We participated in a joint ONR, NRC and CNSC workshop focusing on the advanced steel concrete composite system that makes up the BWRX-300’s reactor's containment structure. | Assurance that assessment outcomes across the three regulators are mutually consistent.  Alignment on the areas of focus as the design continues to develop.  Understanding the degree of regulatory acceptance / approval for the US and Canadian sites under development. |
| Information exchange between ONR and CNSC on the approach taken by the reactor designer and Canadian utility to the failure of safety critical pipework, and associated regulatory expectations. | ONR was able to share advice on the application of long-standing UK methodologies with CNSC, and we gained confidence that the reactor vendor is developing new approaches for the first BWRX-300 unit in Canada that also have the potential to be acceptable in the UK. |
| May 2025 | Presentation from GE-Hitachi to ONR, CNSC and NRC on the BWRX-300 C&I design and the plans to demonstrate adequate the diversity.  Utilities building the BWRX-300 in the US and Canada also observed the presentation, along with regulators and utilities from Poland. | Clarity on the latest design developments and what has been submitted to the three regulators.  Understanding how diversity across I&C platforms has been considered, and plans to expand this demonstration.  Basis for regulators to develop a work plan for future collaboration. |
| We attended a seminar jointly hosted by CNSC and NRC focusing on the stability of the BWRX-300 reactor core, featuring lectures from an international expert in thermal hydraulics. | Alignment across regulators on key technical considerations.  Understanding of how localised reactor behaviour may influence overall stability assessments. |
| June 2025 | Following an ONR intervention at GE-Hitachi’s US headquarters on its quality and management arrangements associated with the GDA and the BWRX-300 design more generally, we provided a briefing to CNSC and NRC on our findings. | Reassurance to the other regulators of the positive conclusions we reached on the arrangements associated with the BWRX-300, to the potential benefit of all regulators. It also allowed ONR to ‘triangulate’ our conclusions with the views of regulators who have been engaging with GE-Hitachi for a much longer period of time. |
| July 2025 | We participated in a tripartite meeting with CNSC and NRC to discuss the completeness and adequacy of BWRX-300 containment modelling that has been provided to all three regulators. | Common appreciation of the adequacy of the design and areas for further substantiation.  NRC and ONR provided advice to CNSC on their respective positions on the BWRX-300 containment model to complement CNSC’s assessment. |
| Holtec SMR-300 | April 2025 | NRC observed a technical engagement between ONR and Holtec on the C&I architecture for the SMR-300 | Facilitating common understanding of the SMR-300 C&I architecture.  Shared understanding of each regulators expectations in key areas such as diversity and defence-in-depth. |
| July 2025 | We visited NRC’s headquarters for an information exchange on the SMR-300 and to share some of the focus areas of our assessment. | Facilitating common understanding of the SMR-300 design.  Identified areas for potential future collaboration. |
| General MoC | Throughout period | We have continued to engage with NRC to explore the potential for information exchange and regulatory cooperation regarding the Westinghouse AP300, Last Energy PWR-20 and TerraPower Natrium, and the Rolls-Royce SMR designs. | ONR has highlighted areas for future engagement informed by what is planned in the UK, and gained an appreciation of similar plans in the US and Canada. |
| SMR Regulators’ forum | April and June 2025 | We attended the most recent meeting of the SMR regulators’ forum, held at the IAEA headquarters in Vienna. At the meeting the forward programme of work to progress the Forum’s phase 4 reports was agreed and ONR proposals for further activities on SMR licensing were tabled amongst other topics. ONR continues to directly support forum, holding the vice-chair role and contributing to planned regional educational workshops. | Demonstrating leadership on the international stage. Influencing common regulatory positions and advancing efforts towards greater standardisation. |
| IAEA NHSI | April 2025 | We attended the first meeting of the new NHSI group on security.  At the first meeting the terms of reference for the group were agreed, as were the outputs that the group will deliver through phase 2 of the NHSI work. | Influencing common regulatory positions and advancing efforts towards greater collaboration and harmonisation. |
| We also attended the NSHI Working Group 3 (WG3) ‘developing a process to leverage the reviews of other regulators and for regulators to work together during ongoing regulatory reviews’. We contributed to the development of the practical tools for categorising information and judging the degree to which information from one regulatory body can be leveraged in a different jurisdiction. Noting the extensive body of regulatory judgements available from ONR GDA published reports, we welcomed their consideration by the Hub and ongoing consultation with ONR as Artificial Intelligence tools are applied. |
| CNRA WGNT | April 2025 | We chaired the fifth meeting of the WGNT. | Demonstrating leadership and setting direction.  Promoting standardisation through establishing common positions on complex and contentious issues. |
| CNRA accepted (and praised) the work of the C&I task group on “common position on the treatment common cause failure caused by software within digital safety systems”. |
| CNRA accepted a WGNT proposal to start a new task group on developing a common position on assessing the safety demonstration of digital instrumentation and control systems and components important to safety used at nuclear power plants. The UK is leading on this work. |
| June 2025 | We participated in a workshop led by the structural integrity group, on qualification and through-life performance of materials in advanced reactors. | Exploring opportunities for harmonisation and standardisation. |
| Other activities | April 2025 | We supported the UK government at a US trade delegation visit to the UK, including a roundtable discussion jointly hosted by the US Nuclear Energy Institute and the UK Nuclear Industry Association | Promoting ONR’s commitment to international collaboration and standardisation. Provision of advice to facilitate removal of barriers (real and perceived) to deployment in the UK. |
| We supported the FCDO at the bilateral ‘Chain Bridge Forum’ between the UK and Hungary, participating in a panel discussion on Hungarian-UK nuclear collaboration.  We also met with the Hungarian nuclear safety regulator (HAEA) to explore areas for future collaboration. | Furthering international understanding of the UK approach to nuclear regulation and its applicability and transferability to other countries.  Demonstration of our commitment to international collaboration. |
| June 2025 | We observed the European Commission nuclear safety independent advisory group’s (ENSREG) technical forum on SMRs. The forum was focused on the Rolls-Royce SMR and the potential to utilise ONR’s assessment of the reactor technology. | Providing clarity and understanding of our ongoing assessment of the technology.  Appreciation of potential opportunities or regulatory collaboration; understanding of potential concerns and barriers. |

# Lookahead

Table 2 sets out our anticipated international regulatory engagements over the coming quarter.

Table 2: Anticipated international engagement from August – October 2025

| Programme | Date | Activity | Outcomes sought |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| GE-Hitachi BWRX-300 | August 2025 | We will agree a work plan with CNSC and NRC for collaborative regulatory working on the BWRX-300 C&I design and demonstration of diversity between I&C platforms, and subsequent work in accordance with the agreed plan. | Guidance to the reactor vendor and its utility partners on shared regulatory expectations (and any potential differences) to assist in the development of an international standardised design and common supporting documentation. |
| Holtec SMR-300 | August – December 2025 | We will continue discussions with NRC and Holtec to identify and agree upon topics for further information exchange. C&I and structural modularity have been identified as two candidate topics. | Agreement of a programme of engagement to mutually develop understanding of the SMR-300 design and discuss areas of particular significance. |
| General MoC | Ongoing | We will continue to engage with NRC and CNSC to explore the potential for information exchange and regulatory cooperation regarding future projects. | Agreed plans for co-operation to align programmes, improve harmonisation and realise efficiencies to benefit all stakeholders. |
| SMR Regulators’ forum | August – December 2025 | We will attend the next formal meeting of the SMR Regulators’ forum to be held at the IAEA headquarters in Vienna. | Enhance nuclear safety by identifying and resolving common safety issues that may challenge regulatory reviews associated with SMRs and by facilitating robust and thorough regulatory decisions. |
| IAEA NHSI | August – December 2025 | We will participate in the next NHSI WG3 meetings. The meeting will progress tools for leveraging information and for dealing with areas of regulatory differences between member states. We will also participate in virtual NHSI WG 3 activities scheduled in September 2025. | Develop a regulatory toolkit for dealing with and harmonising areas of regulatory difference resulting from design review. |
| December 2025 | We will participate in the next meeting of the security working group. | Establishment of common positions on security considerations for SMRs and secure by design methodologies. |
| CNRA WGNT | October 2025 | We will chair the sixth meeting of the WGNT. | Demonstrating leadership and setting direction. |
| Other activities | September 2025 | We will host a side event at the IAEA General Conference on ‘International Collaboration on Small Modular Reactor design assessments’. | Demonstrating leadership and setting direction.  Demonstrating our commitment to and promoting the benefits of international collaboration. |
| August – December 2025 | We will engage with Newcleo and ASN to explore the potential for information exchange and regulatory cooperation regarding the Newcleo LFR-AS-200 design. | Agree plan for co-operation to align programmes, improve harmonisation and realise efficiencies to benefit all stakeholders. |

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