

The background of the entire page is a black and white photograph of numerous crumpled black plastic bags, likely representing waste. The right side of the image is partially obscured by a solid blue vertical bar.

just
zero

2022-2023
ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMARY

Just Zero works alongside communities, policy makers, scientists, educators, organizers, and others to implement just and equitable solutions to climate damaging and toxic production, consumption, and waste disposal practices.

We are the only nonprofit organization working on policy solutions across the U.S. to address the full spectrum of our waste crisis – from single-use plastics production, to food waste, to recycling failures, landfills, incinerators, and other false solutions. Because people deserve Zero Waste solutions with zero climate-damaging emissions and zero toxic exposures.

For more information, please visit just-zero.org.

Cover Photo: Shutterstock

Photo to right: Shutterstock

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“For those forced to live near fossil fuel refineries and forced to live near plastic production facilities, the environment has already collapsed.”

**– Kevin Budris, Advocacy Director
in *ecoRI News***

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The road to Zero Waste is long, but our small, mighty crew has already made strides across the United States – in just one year. Wanting to build a more just and sustainable future through community-centered Zero Waste solutions, we set on a path to educate people about real Zero Waste policies, design those policies through good laws and regulations, and advocate for real solutions alongside other groups and coalitions.

This path led to a productive first year. We built partnerships with leaders and activists across the country and hosted events that dove deep into Zero Waste in a clear, accessible way. Community members and policy makers throughout the U.S. used our resources – including model bills, reports, stories, and comment letters. People from California to Massachusetts, Wyoming to Florida, and Washington to Virginia, have looked to our website and our e-newsletter for the latest Zero Waste updates.

Advocates and lawmakers have also come to rely on our assistance in designing sensible waste policies that protect all communities. Just Zero's model bills have helped inform legislation in Illinois, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, and Rhode Island. We've worked with federal legislators and agencies to protect communities from plastic pollution, and we've worked with local communities facing dangerous proposals to build unnecessary, toxic, and expensive waste facilities.

All of us at Just Zero are grateful to be able to do this work. Because, if this year has shown us anything, it's that we urgently need to make progress on implementing real solutions to our climate-damaging, toxic, and inequitable production, consumption, and waste-disposal practices. Communities across the U.S. face a constant onslaught from dangerous facilities that make, process, and burn single-use plastics. And the industries that profit from waste invest millions in misinformation campaigns to keep us trapped in a lethal, unjust, waste-filled world.

Just Zero is up to the challenge. And we'll do even more in the year ahead to push back against the treacherous status quo and bring Zero Waste solutions to people across the country. We're hard at work growing our reach, expanding our staff, creating new resources, and partnering with communities to enact bold laws and policies that will mold our Zero Waste future while stopping polluting facilities in their tracks.

Thank you for supporting us through our first year and as we build on our successes over the years to come. Your generous contributions make this all possible, and they bring us one step closer to the just, equitable Zero Waste world we all deserve.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kirstie Pecci".

Kirstie Pecci (she/her)
Executive Director

JUST ZERO'S APPROACH

76 million people in the U.S. live within 3 miles of a landfill or incinerator.

That's 76 million people too many. Burning and burying trash is a dangerous business. Often located in Black communities and other communities of color, low-income communities, and communities of limited English-speaking proficiency, these outdated facilities poison public health, damage our climate, and pollute the environment.

But just, equitable Zero Waste solutions can transform lives and the environment – providing more people with access to clean air, fresh water, green jobs, and healthier neighborhoods.



Photo: iStock

AREAS OF IMPACT

End Burning Now

Burning any kind of waste releases dangerous toxics that damage the climate and threaten public health. Working alongside communities and lawmakers to shut down toxic waste-burning facilities, stop new ones from being built, and design laws that make them harder to build and operate will put an end to dangerous trash-burning once and for all.

Photo: Shutterstock

Keep Compost Clean

80 million tons of food goes to waste each year – producing methane in landfills, burning in climate-damaging incinerators, rotting in fields, and ending up as toxic sewage sludge. Developing and advocating for good food waste laws will drive composting infrastructure while maximizing the economic and environmental benefits of food waste.

Photo: Shutterstock

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Right

The U.S. produces about 300 million tons of trash each year, most of which is unrecyclable single-use products. Designing and supporting laws and regulations that rethink how we approach our production, consumption, and disposal processes will advance community-centered systems that save money, minimize pollution, and create jobs.

Photo: Shutterstock

Stop Burying Trash

The U.S. buries most of its trash in landfills. But the hundreds of toxics in our trash, including forever chemicals known as PFAS, inevitably escape and harm our groundwater, soil, air, and communities. Urging state governments to transition to Zero Waste systems that reduce, reuse, recycle, and compost, means we can eliminate almost all the trash we send to landfills right now.

Photo: iStock

HOW WE WORK

To put an end to our waste crisis, we need a holistic approach. One that not only shuts down dangerous waste facilities, but also advances policy solutions that stop waste before it starts. That's why we're using every tool available to us to advocate for what's right.



Education

We use conversations, written resources, and educational events to spread the word about Zero Waste policy initiatives.



Policy

We draft model legislation, we work with lawmakers and advocates to support nation-leading Zero Waste proposals, and we advocate before regulatory agencies faced with important waste-related decisions.



Community Engagement

We engage with community groups, grassroots organizations, and coalitions to help them blaze their own Zero Waste trails.



Photo: Unsplash

Federal Trade Commission to Update Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims

As demand for sustainable products has skyrocketed, so have concerns about greenwashing. Especially when it comes to recyclability.

Despite a dismal 5%-6% plastic recycling rate in the U.S. and rising public backlash about the prevalence of unrecyclable single-use plastic products, companies continue to use plastic when designing and packaging their products. Worse, many companies falsely label their plastic products and packaging as recyclable – even though there is no evidence that these products are actually recycled.

The Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims, or Green Guides, are supposed to curb widespread corporate greenwashing regarding the recyclability of plastics. But that's not happening. Why? Because the standard for determining whether a product or packaging is recyclable does not reflect the actual data.

Originally published in Just Zero's e-newsletter, Just the Facts, on May 4, 2023.

Photo: Shutterstock

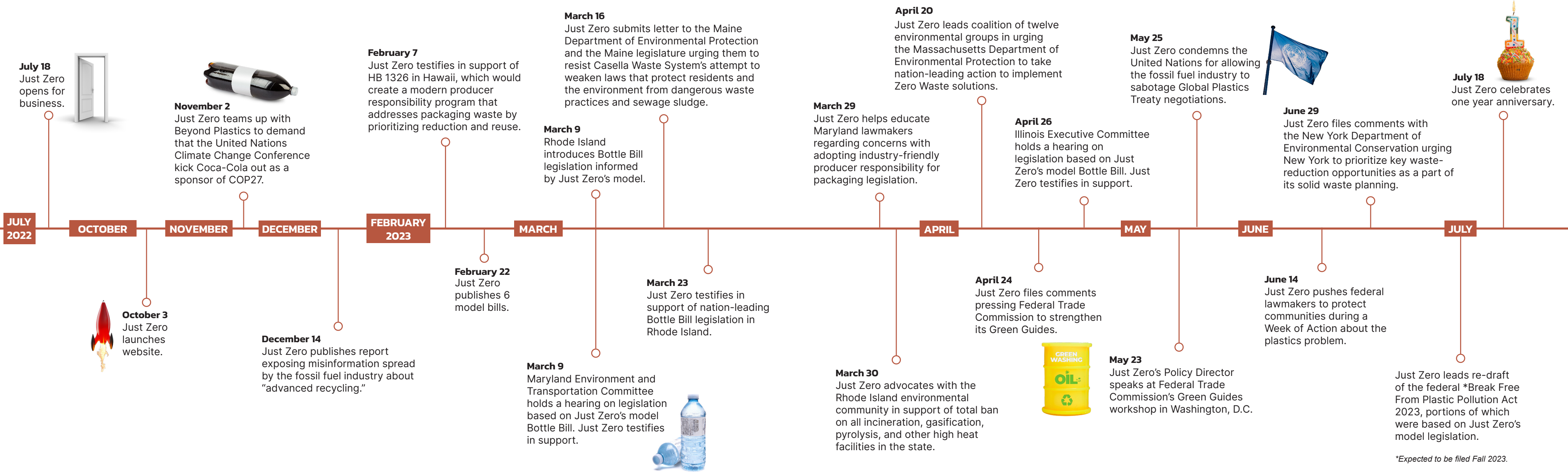
The standard only focuses on collection, and whether the product or packaging is actually recycled – or even capable of being recycled – into a new product.

To top it off, the Green Guides haven't been updated in over a decade. And a LOT has happened since then.

But on Dec. 14, 2022, the FTC voted unanimously to seek public comment on its Green Guides with the intention of updating them. Now, on May 23, 2023, the FTC is hosting a workshop as part of their review of the guides. Just Zero's own Policy Director has been invited to present at the workshop and discuss the need for clearer, stronger, and enforceable protections that will prevent continued greenwashing of single-use plastic.

This is a critical moment. We need a strong federal standard that will hold companies accountable and make sure that only truly recyclable materials can be labeled and marketed as such.

2022-2023 AT A GLANCE



**Expected to be filed Fall 2023.*

Toxic smoke from chemical train crash in East Palestine, Ohio on February 3, 2023.

Photo: Shutterstock

Ohio Train Derailment is a Plastic Pollution Disaster

A February 3rd train derailment brought explosions, thick black smoke, and toxic chemicals – many of them used in plastics production – to East Palestine, Ohio.

The Situation

Plastic pollution is about much more than just plastic straws and soda bottles washing up on beaches. Plastics pollute at every stage of their lifecycle, and that includes transporting toxic chemicals used to make plastics across the country and world. The East Palestine derailment drives home the catastrophic costs – especially to those living near this disaster – that come with runaway plastics production.

The dangerous toxics released by wrecked train cars in East Palestine include vinyl chloride (which can cause cancer and nervous system damage), isobutylene (a skin irritant that can cause coma or death at high concentrations), and butyl acrylate (which can cause permanent lung damage). All these chemicals are used in the manufacture of plastics.

Now What?

Emergency crews responded to the wreck by burning many of the toxic chemicals spilling out of the train cars. That process may have simply replaced one disaster with another. When vinyl chloride is burned, for example, it releases phosgene, hydrogen chloride, and dioxins – all of which are highly toxic.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has said it is safe for residents to return to their homes. Yet, many are suffering from respiratory issues and skin reactions, and dead animals have been found nearby. At a minimum, Norfolk Southern, the company operating the derailed train, must be held accountable. And the government must take all available steps to protect and compensate nearby residents.

This much is clear: The East Palestine train derailment disaster illustrates that the cycle of plastics production and disposal forced on us by the petrochemical industry puts lives at risk. The sooner we put an end to that cycle, the better.

Originally published in Just Zero's e-newsletter, Just the Facts, on February 23, 2023.

COMMUNICATION HIGHLIGHTS

Just Zero staff create content and build messaging that educates, engages, and informs communities, advocates, legislators, press, and others.

Here are some story and media highlights from July 2022-June 2023.



Just Zero is indebted to the legacy and leadership of the Black and brown leaders from Warren County, North Carolina, and to all the leaders in the environmental justice movement. We look to their legacy and leadership as we strive to center our own work through an environmental justice lens. Because all people – regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or location – deserve to live in healthy, safe communities free from polluting waste facilities

Environmental Injustice is Deeply Rooted in Racism

By Kirstie Pecci



“We’ve created this organization understanding that the problem has gotten even more extreme, even more unjust and unfair.”

– Kirstie Pecci, Waste Dive



“We haven’t had any meaningful, comprehensive new laws or policies related to waste reduction or diversion in years. The lack of action from Congress has set us back.”

– Peter Blair, Packaging Insights



“The petrochemical and waste industries push pyrolysis on communities across the country to keep us hooked on a cycle of making and destroying plastic and other waste.”

– Kevin Budris, The Boston Globe



Environmental justice communities are not responsible for our waste crisis. Corporate polluters looking to make a profit off of trash are. Why then should neighborhoods like where I grew up house these polluting facilities?

Environmental Justice Communities are Not Responsible for Our Waste Crisis

By Lauren Fernandez



“There is no safe concentration of PFAS. And so, adding it to soil as a fertilizer - it’s a disconnect from the reality of the harm of this family of chemicals. And so, the logical thing to do is just not spread it all over the place.”

– Laura Orlando, NPR



“There is no good choice between incinerators and landfills. They are both toxic, climate-damaging and false solutions that only benefit waste management companies and companies that are generating waste in the first place.”

– Kevin Budris, The Concord Monitor



For decades, the companies producing plastic have claimed that the products they make are widely recyclable. And they tell us that careless consumers who litter and don’t recycle are the cause of plastic pollution. But this just isn’t true. The reality is, most plastic was never designed to be recyclable, and it will never be recycled.

The Plastic Pollution Problem – We Can’t Recycle Our Way Out of It

By Peter Blair



“What gets into wastewater is just about everything that we use in our society, because it’s the pollution sink for what’s out there. Which is a big deal when we’re talking about PFAS.”

– Laura Orlando, WBUR



“But where we can expect corporations to do better is to be honest about why these facilities are located where they’re located, and how far-flung the negative impacts from these facilities are.”

Kirstie Pecci, Waste Dive



“Making it easier to burn plastic is only going to make the crisis worse.”

– Kevin Budris, American Bar Association Podcast



Composting our food waste is a solution that can help fight climate change and protect healthy soils. Composting right can help us grow more nutritious food, strengthen soil health, employ more people, create more businesses, and offset climate-damaging emissions. When composting is not possible, anaerobic digestion can be a solution – but only if food waste is NOT mixed with sewage sludge.

Why We Need to Stop Mixing Food Waste with Sewage Sludge

By Laura Orlando



Coke’s plastic use is enough to taint the whole event [COP27]. It “makes it hard to see this meeting as anything more than a performative act.”

– Peter Blair, Politico

COMMUNICATION HIGHLIGHTS



"There's widespread consumer confusion about what is recyclable. We're a bunch of experts in this room and even we're not agreeing."

– Peter Blair, Bloomberg Law



We need to build stronger laws, better policies, and smarter systems from the ground up. That's the only way to stop waste, climate damage, and profit-driven pollution before they start.

Why It's Time to Stop Putting Polluters in Charge

By Kevin Budris

Year One by the Numbers

9,687 Unique Web Visitors	43 Media Hits	20 Press Releases
525 Twitter Followers	437 LinkedIn Followers	3 Op-eds placed in online news outlets.
1 Report: Loopholes, Injustice, & the "Advanced Recycling" Myth	258 Instagram Followers	204 People attended webinar series: Getting to Zero Waste in the U.S.
	3 Webinar Events	

Celebrating New Jersey's Bag Ban

New Jersey's single-use Bag Ban has been in effect for six months. The results speak volumes for how impactful these laws can be. As the strongest single-use plastic ban in the nation, it's no surprise that it was first met with skepticism. Why? Because it doesn't just ban single-use plastic bags, but also bans grocery stores from providing customers with single-use paper bags.

But the decision to ban both plastic and paper bags was critical. The point of these bills isn't to replace plastic bags with paper ones, but to encourage people to use reusable grocery bags.

Six months in and New Jersey is seeing incredible results! A study of 160 grocery stores found that, before the ban went into effect, they were handing out 56.1 MILLION single-use plastic bags per month. Now, that number is ZERO – and that's just in grocery stores.

The results from New Jersey show just how impactful well-designed single-use plastic laws can be. Meaning, we need more laws aimed at reducing single-use plastics – and stat.

Originally published in Just Zero's e-newsletter, Just the Facts, on December 1, 2022.



Photo on right: Shutterstock



“I really look at us [Just Zero] as being truth-tellers and also promoting the ideas that are sustainable and fair and clean as possible.”

**– Kirstie Pecci, Executive Director
in the Community Composting Podcast**

Photo: Shutterstock

Plastic Bottles Threaten Public Health, the Environment, and Our Climate

Single-use plastic bottles are everywhere in our lives. We’re told by Beverage Giants that these bottles are safe, convenient, and sustainable – none of which is true. And now, a new report from Defend Our Health dives deep into the toxic, dangerous, unjust, and climate-threatening chemical footprint created by every single one of these bottles.

The petrochemical facilities that make the billions of plastic bottles sold each year release dangerous, cancer-causing toxics. The health burdens created by these facilities fall disproportionately on communities of color and low-income communities.

And the hazards don’t end there. According to the report, plastic bottles leach more than 150 chemicals into food and beverages. This includes antimony, a carcinogen frequently detected in beverages sold in plastic bottles.

Most single-use plastic bottles end up in landfills and incinerators. But even when plastic bottles end up in recycling facilities, they continue to spread dangerous toxics. Recycling plastic bottles can spread cancer-causing toxics like benzene and styrene, which end up in our environment or back in plastic bottles made from recycled content.

This much is clear from Defend Our Health’s excellent new report: the only way to address the toxic footprint of plastic bottles is to stop making plastic bottles!

Originally published in Just Zero’s e-newsletter, Just the Facts, on June 2, 2023.



Photo: Shutterstock

FINANCIALS

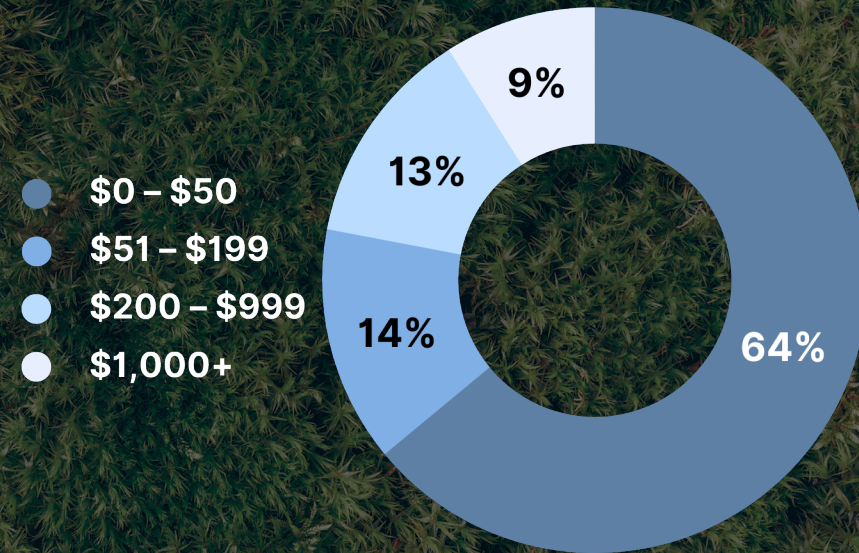
Just Zero would be nothing more than an idea without the generous supporters who believe in our work. We started with a vision, a plan, and a lot of spirit, but it was your investment that made this all possible. And what an investment it was! In our first year, we received more than \$740,000 in donations*, which we put right to work building our Zero Waste future.

This year, more than 140 people, foundations, and funds gave to Just Zero. These contributions come from twenty different U.S. states and the District of Columbia. And thirty-one of these amazing folks signed up to be recurring donors. They come from all walks of life, but they're united by their desire to see a more just, equitable world built on Zero Waste solutions. Together, these contributors believe that this small, mighty team can help make that dream a reality.

We believe, in turn, that these investments in Just Zero should go directly to building that Zero Waste world. That's why we use your contributions to do the work. Of every dollar Just Zero spent this year, more than 84% was used to fund the work our staff does every day. That means your money goes to educating people about Zero Waste policies, designing the right laws and regulations, and advocating for real solutions.

Just Zero has big plans for the year ahead, and we're relying on our supporters to help us bring those plans to fruition. Please continue to invest in Just Zero as we all work together to make a difference through sensible waste policies that protect all communities.

2022-2023 Gift Amounts



Just Zero Membership

Just Zero is a member-supported organization. That means we rely on donations from our members to fund our advocacy work. But it also means we look to our members for guidance on our priorities and for help spreading the word about important opportunities to make a difference. Just Zero members are our partners and collaborators as we strive for just and equitable solutions to our waste crisis.

[Learn more](#) and become a member.

*For more information, please review our 990, when it is publicly available later this year.

INVEST IN JUST ZERO

Donate

Make a gift to Just Zero by filling out our online donation form:

www.just-zero.org

Or by sending a check to:

Just Zero
122 McGilpin Rd.
Sturbridge, MA 01566

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www.just-zero.org

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