



Green Allegheny Issue & Policy Agenda



In cooperation with:



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Introduction

HOME TO MORE THAN 1.2 MILLION PEOPLE,

Allegheny County has an abundance of natural amenities that make the region special. From our iconic Three Rivers to our beautiful county parks, our natural environment enhances residents' quality of life and makes this a great place to live, work and visit.

Our rivers and other natural resources have also served as the foundation for the industrial heritage that built both Pittsburgh and the nation. While these industries have polluted our air and water for more than a century, it was a sacrifice many previous generations were willing to make to build wealth and the middle class.

That choice has had devastating consequences for our environment and public health. Air pollution in Allegheny County is responsible for asthma rates in some communities that are three times higher than the national average, elevated incidences of multiple cancers, and excess deaths from coronary heart disease.^{1,2,3} At the same time, thousands of kids in Allegheny County test positive for lead and are found to have lead poisoning every year.⁴ Climate change is causing record-setting rainfalls and extreme weather events that have overburdened Allegheny County's aging infrastructure and put lives and property at risk.⁵ And our rivers continue to be polluted by billions of gallons of runoff, untreated sewage and industrial pollution annually.

Thankfully, Allegheny County no longer needs to make a choice between prosperity and a clean and healthy environment. In fact, we have an opportunity to solve many of our region's most profound environmental and health challenges, while building a local economy at the forefront of energy efficiency, clean energy, modern infrastructure, preserving our great public lands and county parks, and prioritizing environmental remediation and protection.

But to get there, we need Allegheny County's leaders to prioritize environmental protection and public health.

That's why Pittsburgh region organizations and leaders have come together to create and endorse this Green Allegheny Issue & Policy Agenda. This document is intended to inform local leaders about policy solutions that will help solve the biggest threats to Allegheny County's environment and public health.

The following issue briefs and policy recommendations have been compiled by advocates and experts who specifically work to solve these problems in the Pittsburgh region. Across these broad categories of concern, the organizations endorsing this document urge leaders to carry out these recommendations with transparency and accountability, engaging our groups and communities in these solutions, and publicly reporting progress on these issues annually.

Issue Briefs and Policy Recommendations

Cleaning up Allegheny County's Air

ALLEGHENY COUNTY'S AIR HAS CONSISTENTLY

ranked among the nation's most polluted. In 2020, Pittsburgh had 57 days of elevated ozone and/or particulate matter pollution.⁶ And the American Lung Association's 2022 State of the Air report gave Allegheny County F's for short-term particulate pollution and ozone pollution.⁷

Across Allegheny County, more than 25,000 children suffer from asthma. In some school districts in close proximity to industrial polluters, as many as 22.5% of school kids have asthma. This is nearly triple the national average of 8%.⁸



U.S. Steel Clairton Coke Works

Our local air pollution includes cancer-causing chemicals, neurotoxins, particulate matter (soot), and smog. Exposure to ozone and particulate pollution has been linked to premature death, damage to respiratory and cardiovascular systems, worsened mental health and neural functioning, reproductive health challenges and more.⁹

Moreover, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center's Toxic Ten report found that more than 60% of the toxic industrial air pollution reported to the Environmental Protection Agency in Allegheny County comes from just ten facilities. These ten facilities release almost a million pounds of toxic air pollution annually.¹⁰

The good news is that studies show that we can improve local health when we reduce these pollution levels. In one particularly stark example, the Allegheny County Health Department found that emergency room visits for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) were reduced by 37.9%, while emergency department visits for heart attacks and strokes decreased by 26.5% in the year following the closure of the Shenango Coke Plant on Neville Island.¹¹

In addition to health benefits, when polluters are required to take action to reduce air pollution, studies show that our economy and our workforce benefit. After all, air pollution control equipment must be manufactured, installed, and operated by people. In 2018, the United States' environmental technologies



U.S. Steel Edgar Thomson Works

and services industry employed 1.6 million people, with jobs in manufacturing, skilled trades, construction, project management and engineers.¹² Case studies show that local environmental regulation increases labor demand.¹³

Allegheny County officials must address the region's air quality problems swiftly and successfully. The good news is that local officials have the tools to do just that: the Allegheny County Health Department is empowered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to enforce the Clean Air Act in the region and enact more stringent local regulations to protect public health.

In order to tackle the region's air pollution crisis, leaders in Allegheny County should support the following:

- **The Allegheny County Health Department must strengthen enforcement of the Clean Air Act and existing local regulations to protect public health. This includes:**
 - Levying maximum fines for illegal pollution events to ensure it doesn't pay to pollute
 - Idling facilities that have a track record of chronic violations, and/or when pollution control technology is not functioning as required by the facility's air pollution permit
 - Requiring new oil & gas wells to go through a permit process that formalizes air pollution limits and holds companies accountable to the Clean Air Act

- Publishing Title V permits for facilities that have never had them -- ATI's Brackenridge Works and Eastman Chemicals & Resins -- and complying with County regulations that require permits to be renewed within 18 months of their expiration, ensuring that permits don't languish and put the public's health at risk¹⁴
- **The County can make improvements to the Health Department and Board of Health that would 1) help achieve the goals above, 2) make information about air pollution more accessible to the public, and 3) better assist the communities that are most profoundly impacted by industrial air pollution. Those improvements include:**
 - Selecting a Health Department Director with environmental health expertise who will make tackling Allegheny County's air pollution a top priority
 - Choosing Board of Health appointees who have specific expertise in environmental and public health, as well as air pollution regulation and enforcement
 - Enacting an environmental justice policy that ensures the same degree of protection and engagement for all residents of Allegheny County, and provides residents of all communities with reasonable access to information and decisionmaking related to the issues that impact them
 - Creating more specific standards for spending the Clean Air Fund (a pot of money funded by polluter fines) to ensure that this money is used strategically to reduce air pollution and help people impacted by air pollution in Allegheny County
 - Making information about air pollution and its health impacts available to the public in the most prevalent non-English languages spoken in Allegheny County
 - Budgeting County funds to the Air Quality Division to expand enforcement staffing, speed up permitting and review, expand technical expertise, and build robust legal capacity to defend polluter enforcement actions in court.

Powering Allegheny County with Renewable Energy and Cutting Carbon Emissions

CLIMATE CHANGE IS THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS of our lifetime. And over the last decade, the impacts of climate change have become clear to people living in the Pittsburgh region. Record-setting rainfalls and more extreme weather events have pushed our aging infrastructure and public safety to the brink, including flash floods that have put people's lives at risk and landslides that endanger homes, roads and other infrastructure.

If nothing is done to slow climate change, the Union of Concerned Scientists predicts that by 2050, Allegheny

County will experience 55 days a year with a heat index above 90 (compared to 12 as of 2019).¹⁵ These extreme heat events can trap pollution and allergens, which can make asthma worse for the many asthma sufferers in Allegheny County. More broadly, extreme heat is a top cause of weather-related deaths, though it doesn't impact everyone equally. Many people cannot afford to cool their homes, and urban areas typically get hotter and stay hot longer due to lack of tree cover and surfaces that absorb and radiate heat.¹⁶



Dan Brown via PennEnvironment CC BY 2.0

Solar panels at Mill 19 on the redeveloped former site of the Pittsburgh Jones & Laughlin Steel Company

We can have safer and healthier communities and a livable future for generations to come -- but to get there, we need to transform the way we produce and consume energy. That means a major effort to conserve energy and use it more efficiently, and a quick and steady transition to clean, renewable sources of energy to meet our needs here in Allegheny County and beyond.

Happily, the transition to energy efficiency and clean renewable energy also comes with economic benefits for our region. Clean Energy is one of the fastest growing sectors in Pennsylvania and Allegheny County is home to nearly 13,000 of these jobs.¹⁷ The majority of these local jobs are in the energy efficiency sector, which importantly, requires local skilled labor and cannot be outsourced. Seventy-six percent of Pennsylvania's energy efficiency businesses are small, with fewer than 20 employees.¹⁸

In order to tackle climate change in Allegheny County, candidates and local elected officials should support the following:

- **The County Executive and Sustainability Department should undertake an inventory of the county's properties, buildings, and fleets that quantifies energy and fuel usage and operating costs. That inventory should then be used to identify opportunities to reduce the County's energy and fuel use, including:**
 - Entering into Energy Performance Contracts with guaranteed energy / cost savings for all County-owned buildings, or making energy efficiency improvements like insulation and equipment upgrades that meaningfully reduce power needs for county-owned facilities



Courtesy of PRT

Pittsburgh Regional Transit Electric Bus

- Powering county-owned facilities with 100% renewable energy by installing solar on county-owned properties and/or entering into power purchase agreements that build new grid-scale renewable energy infrastructure to make Allegheny County a renewable energy hub
- Committing to electrifying the County's vehicle fleet by phasing out the purchase of light-duty internal combustion engine vehicles by 2030, and electrifying the rest as soon as possible
- **Reduce Allegheny County's overall carbon emissions from buildings through policy and advocacy by:**
 - Creating a marketing plan that more robustly advertises the Allegheny County C-PACE program, which is a financing mechanism that allows commercial, industrial, and agricultural property owners to obtain long-term financing to pay for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and water conservation projects. These projects in turn reduce the property owner's utility costs and reduce the overall carbon footprint in Allegheny County
 - Calling on all 130 municipalities in Allegheny County to cooperate on power purchase agreements for their power needs that would finance new local renewable energy projects and reduce the overall carbon footprint of Allegheny County
- **Expand public transportation, promote multimodal connections, electrify buses, and power Pittsburgh Regional Transit with renewable energy by:**
 - Supporting and continuing to advocate for Pittsburgh Regional Transit's commitment to electrifying the 730-bus fleet by 2045 and only buying electric buses after 2032¹⁹
 - Advocate for Pittsburgh Regional Transit to pursue renewable energy projects and investments that ensure its operations and future electric fleet are powered by clean, renewable energy
 - Increase funding for Pittsburgh Regional Transit to expand transit access county-wide
 - Developing and implementing a countywide complete streets plan for county roads that supports walking and biking to transit connections wherever possible
- **Advance the transition to zero-emission electric commercial and consumer vehicles in Allegheny County by:**
 - Working with utility partners to install public electric vehicle charging infrastructure at County-owned facilities, including parks and recreational facilities
 - Promote the use of federal electric vehicle incentives provided in the Inflation Reduction Act for individuals, governments and nonprofits through public education and municipal coordination
- **Reduce fossil fuel extraction in Allegheny County by:**
 - Appointing members to authority boards who will support powering County Authorities with renewable energy and oppose projects that develop new or extend existing fossil fuel extraction
 - Publicly opposing all new fossil fuel projects, including dirty hydrogen fuel proposals, plastics-to-fuels proposals and fracking

Making Allegheny County a Leader in Zero Waste Policies and Reining In Plastic Pollution

NOTHING WE USE FOR 5 MINUTES SHOULD POLLUTE

our communities and our environment for decades and centuries to come. Americans generate more than 35 million tons of plastic waste each year and less than 10% gets recycled.²⁰ In addition to burdening our neighborhoods and roadsides with litter, plastics threaten wildlife, our waterways, and our climate.

Over time, plastic bags and other products break down into microplastics, which can contain chemicals linked to cancer and hormone disruption. More and more, these microplastics are being found in our drinking water, Pittsburgh's Three Rivers, the fish we eat, and even the air we breathe.²¹ Single-use plastics also increase the demand for fuels like fracked gas and increase the risks to our air and water that accompany its extraction. Without changing course, emissions from plastics production and incineration could amount to 56 gigatons of carbon between now and 2050 - or almost 50 times the annual emissions of all of the coal fired power plants in the U.S.²²

The most effective way to reduce plastic waste and emissions is to implement policies that dramatically reduce the use of unnecessary plastics in our communities. To date, 14 Pennsylvania municipalities, including Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, have banned the use of

single-use plastic bags. More than 16% of Pennsylvania's population now lives in a community where single-use plastic bags are banned, saving nearly 1,000 tons of plastic annually.²³ But there is also much we can do to improve solid waste management in our communities to ensure that recycling services are available and contributing to a zero-waste economy.



Ivan Radic via Flickr CC BY 2.0

Plastic Pollution

In addition to its environmental benefits, the recycling industry added \$22.6 billion to Pennsylvania's economy in 2015 alone, directly employing more than 66,000 people statewide, while stimulating almost 110,000 indirect jobs.²⁴

To reduce waste, bolster recycling, and move us toward a zero-waste economy, local leaders should:

- **Reduce single-use plastics at the source by promoting alternatives through policy, advocacy and county operations by:**
 - Working with the Allegheny County Health Department to ban foam takeout containers at restaurants and grocery stores, and enforcing that rule through the Food Safety program, which already inspects food preparation sites
 - Implementing a prohibition on single-use plastic shopping bags county-wide, and placing a fee on paper bags to incentivize people to use reusable bags
 - Making county facilities and county-sponsored events zero waste
 - Advocating for all Allegheny County municipalities to provide curbside recycling pickup (80 currently have curbside collection and 19 have drop-off recycling)
 - Coordinating regular and well-advertised e-waste and hard-to-recycle events for the public
 - Working with Allegheny County Economic Development to negotiate bulk purchase agreements for plastic alternatives, and make that bulk purchase rate available to small businesses looking to move toward zero waste



Plastic bag pollution

- Use the platform of County Executive to work with the Councils of Government (COGs) to enact multi-municipal waste and recycling contracts that expand and improve recycling services and reduce costs for municipalities in Allegheny County

Protecting Allegheny County's Rivers and Streams

ALLEGHENY COUNTY'S RIVERS AND STREAMS

make this region special. They're why Pittsburgh was founded here, and they have played a central role in the growth and development of this region for centuries. And now, since the passage of the Clean Water Act fifty years ago, our riverfronts have become scenic places for recreation. Unfortunately, the rivers still aren't as clean as they should be, and they are not meeting the original aims of the Clean Water Act, thanks to stormwater runoff, combined sewer overflows, and industrial pollution.

Currently, across Allegheny county, rain runs off of impervious surfaces such as roads, parking lots and rooftops and into the wastewater system, where it mixes with raw sewage. In Pennsylvania, annual precipitation totals from 2000 to 2020 were nearly 5 inches higher than the period 1971 to 2000. This influx of excess stormwater, coupled with an aging sewer system, results in untreated sewage being frequently released into the region's streams and rivers.



Monongahela River

CC BY 2.0 David Wilson via Flickr

Heavy industry, largely responsible for our region's dirty air, is also polluting our water. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2020 Toxic Release Inventory, industrial polluters in Pennsylvania dumped 5,861,055 pounds of toxic chemicals into Pennsylvania's waterways - the 12th largest amount of any state or territory in the country.²⁵ The Lower Monongahela Watershed was ranked #21 in the country for having among the largest amounts of toxic pollution, primarily due to U.S. Steel's Clairton Coke Works. According to U.S. Steel's own data, the Clairton Works released more than 2 million pounds of toxic chemicals into the Lower Monongahela watershed - the largest amount from any single facility in the state.²⁶

Our region's leaders have tools to reduce runoff and combined sewer overflows, and they have the position from which to advocate for state and federal laws and enforcement to restrict pollution from industrial sources.

To protect the quality of Allegheny County's rivers and streams, Allegheny County officials should:

- **Reduce runoff contamination and combined sewer overflows by:**

- Working with ALCOSAN to ensure the timely implementation of the authority's U.S. Environmen-

tal Protection Agency required Clean Water Plan, which will separate sanitary and storm sewers and reduce sewage contamination of the Three Rivers

- Working with ALCOSAN to build on the Clean Water Plan to identify and fund green infrastructure projects that make up for long-term deficiencies in the the Clean Water Plan by capturing and absorbing stormwater in communities
- Appointing experts and advocates knowledgeable about the importance of green infrastructure and opportunities for green infrastructure to the ALCOSAN board of directors
- Developing and funding plans for green infrastructure that captures stormwater and eliminates runoff from County-owned buildings and facilities

- **Reduce industrial pollution by:**

- Working closely with the PA Department of Environmental Protection to bring swift inspections and enforcement actions when industrial facilities are suspected of spills or toxic releases into our rivers
- Advocating for the strongest possible Clean Water Act standards

Public domain



Three rivers confluence

Protecting Allegheny County Residents from Lead and other Toxic Threats

WHETHER IN OUR HOMES OR IN OUR COMMUNITIES, people in Allegheny County are exposed to toxic metals and chemicals that are often present in water, paint, and soil.

Lead

Lead is a potent neurotoxin, and childhood exposure to even small amounts of lead can result in lifelong cognitive and behavioral challenges. Lead poisoning is irreversible, but preventable. Between 2015 and 2021, 2,927 young children were identified for having elevated blood lead levels in Allegheny County (referenced as $5\mu\text{dL}$ or greater).²⁷ Unfortunately, there are major

disparities in these numbers -- four times more children of color were found to have lead poisoning than non-hispanic white children in 2018.²⁸

Kids are exposed to lead when they come in contact with chipping, cracking, peeling lead paint and lead dust, lead in soil, and lead in drinking water. Lead has been detected in 80% of Allegheny County water systems, most of which are publicly owned.²⁹ This is because lead pipes, solder and fittings were commonplace until they were prohibited by the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1986. Because many water systems now exceed the Environmental Protection Agency's standard for lead in drinking water, lead pipes are gradually being replaced across Allegheny County, with the majority of replacement occurring in the Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority service area.

Beyond water, kids are exposed to lead paint and dust in their homes and communities. With 80% of the County's housing stock built before 1978 (the year lead was banned from paint) and an industrial past that deposited lead in our soils, it's no surprise that we are seeing these numbers of lead poisoned children in Allegheny County. To keep kids safe and healthy, we must reduce opportunities for lead exposure in homes and our broader community.



Freepik via Freepik

PFAS

PFAS are called “forever chemicals” because they persist in the environment and the human body. Even small exposures to PFAS have been linked to serious health problems, including kidney and liver disease, birth defects and cancer.³⁰ PFAS includes more than 12,000 different chemicals, which are added to many consumer products for their grease- and water-resistant properties.

Incredibly, one in three Pennsylvania drinking water systems exceed the EPA’s recommended limits for these chemicals. Four drinking water systems in Allegheny County were tested in 2021, and two of those were found to have contamination above the EPA’s recommended health limit.³¹ This contamination is suspected to be from thousands of gallons of PFAS fire-fighting foams that were used on military bases at the Pittsburgh International Airport, as well as firefighting training academies and likely spread beyond the property.³² Many local water systems and private wells have not been tested for PFAS chemicals. Pennsylvania has now enacted a rule that limits perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) to 18 parts per trillion and 14 parts per trillion, respectively.

To protect public health and reduce exposures to toxic lead and PFAS contamination, local officials should:

- **Encourage lead remediation and respond to exposures by:**

- Working with the Allegheny County Health Department plumbing division to convene a working group of community water systems to share best practices on lead line replacement, inventorying lead lines, and community education
- Building a lead service line inventory, and publicly tracking replacements
- Working with water utilities to strengthen technical, financial, and managerial capacities into order to ensure eligibility for PennVest and other funding sources that would cover the cost of full lead service line replacements
- Utilizing dust wipe sampling in all inspections of

Housing Authority units and buildings for lead in paint, water, and soil; and remediating or encapsulating lead when found

- Allocating American Rescue Plan funds for the remediation of lead in both private and Allegheny County Housing Authority homes, similar to the programs that have been passed for Pittsburgh
- County-ordered and county-funded demolitions, including those funded by CDBG dollars, should be required to be done with lead-safe practices to limit community exposure to lead that may be present in the building materials

- **Identify, Reduce, and Remediate PFAS Contamination by:**

- Banning the use of PFAS firefighting foams at the Allegheny County Fire Academy
- Pushing the Allegheny County Airport Authority to transition away from the use of PFAS firefighting foams at the Pittsburgh International Airport, and undertake a systematic water testing program to understand the full extent of PFAS firefighting foam contamination of nearby drinking water sources, both public systems and private wells
- Working with the Governor to bring federal PFAS remediation dollars to clean up contaminated drinking water sources within the County

Preserving Allegheny County's Natural Landscapes and Wildlife

ALLEGHENY COUNTY IS HOME TO AMPLE PARKS

and green space, including 9 County regional parks, covering 12,000 acres of forest, lakes, trails, and developed recreation areas.³³ Nearly 76% of the parks' land area is covered with trees, and the parks have more than 100 miles of trails.³⁴ These spaces provide important opportunities for recreation and relaxation, while serving as habitat for wildlife, capturing carbon, mitigating air pollution, and capturing stormwater. Survey data from the Allegheny County Parks Foundation shows that 92% of respondents see the parks as having a role in conserving

the environment, and 87% percent of respondents say the parks improve their mental and physical health.³⁵

In 2022, Allegheny County Council took the long-overdue step of banning fracking in County parks. This is important, because fracking has been allowed underneath Deer Lakes Park in the past, which resulted in the contamination of nearby waterways that eventually flow to the Allegheny River.³⁶

But more must be done to eliminate threats to our parks and maximize access for residents.



GSN7 via Flickr CC BY 2.0

South Park

To fully protect and expand access to Allegheny County's parks, local officials should:

- **Further protect parks spaces from oil and gas development by:**

- Using their elected platforms and legal resources to fight fracking and oil & gas proposals, including injection wells, on properties adjacent to the park, or close enough to threaten parks' water or air quality

- **Protect pollinators and other wildlife by:**

- Prohibiting the use of neonicotinoids, Roundup and other pesticides and herbicides that can persist in the environment and harm pollinators on public lands, as recommended by the 2002 Parks Master Plan

- **Make parks and recreation facilities accessible for all Allegheny County residents by:**

- Expanding transit access to recreation facilities, trails, and natural areas
- Translating public information about the parks into the most prevalent non-English languages spoken in Allegheny County
- Further expanding wheelchair accessible trails and facilities, as well as accessible play spaces, and making information about accessible facilities easy to find on Allegheny County websites



Public Domain

Deer in Allegheny Cemetery



Public Domain

Highland Park benches

Appendix

Further Reading by Topic

Cleaning up Allegheny County's Air

- [Allegheny County Article XXI ~ Air Pollution Control code](#)
- [Cutting through the Smoke \(PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group\)- The history of air pollution enforcement in Allegheny County, failures, and recommendations](#)
- [The Pittsburgh Regional Environmental Health Threats Analysis \(PRETA\) Report \(University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health](#)
- [Allegheny County's Toxic Ten \(PennEnvironment\)](#)
- [National Air Toxics Assessment and Cancer Risk in Allegheny County Pennsylvania](#)
- [Updated - May 2021 \(Cancer & Environment Network of SWPA and Clean Air Task Force\)](#)

Powering Allegheny County with Renewable Energy and Cutting Carbon Emissions

- [Renewables on the Rise Dashboard \(Environment America Research & Policy Center\)](#)
- [Electric Buses in America ~ Lessons from Cities Pioneering Clean Transportation \(Environment America Research & Policy Center\)](#)
- [Destination: Zero-Carbon Fact Sheet - Three Strategies to Transform Transportation in America \(Environment America Research & Policy Center\)](#)
- [Beyond the East Busway Policy Brief: BRT Recommendations in the Mon Valley and Eastern Suburbs \(Pittsburghers for Public Transit\)](#)

- [Inflation Reduction Act EV Incentives Explained \(Plug In America\)](#)

Making Allegheny County a Leader in Zero Waste Policies and Reining In Plastic Pollution

- [Trash in America - Moving from destructive consumption toward a zero-waste system \(Environment America Research & Policy Center\)](#)
- [Act 101 and Recycling in PA: Past, Present and Future \(PA Resources Council and PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center\)](#)

Protecting Allegheny County Residents from Lead and other Toxic Threats

- [Get the Lead Out PGH](#)
- [Something's In the Water - A System Analysis on Quality and Transparency in Allegheny County Community Water Systems \(Women for a Healthy Environment\)](#)
- [Pittsburgh Lead Safety Law ~ Pittsburgh City Council](#)
- [Environmental Working Group: "Updated DOD standards: Critical first step toward firefighting foam made without 'forever chemicals'" January 12, 2023](#)

Preserving Allegheny County's Natural Landscapes and Wildlife

- ["After a decade of research, here's what scientists know about the health impacts of fracking" - Kristina Marusic, Environmental Health News, 4/15/2019](#)

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