July 2012

Examiners' Report

NEBOSH National Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety - Unit B

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NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Unit B: Hazardous agents in the workplace

JULY 2012

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Introduction

NEBOSH (The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health) was formed in 1979 as an independent examining board and awarding body with charitable status. We offer a comprehensive range of globally-recognised, vocationally-related qualifications designed to meet the health, safety, environmental and risk management needs of all places of work in both the private and public sectors. Courses leading to NEBOSH qualifications attract around 35,000 candidates annually and are offered by over 500 course providers, with examinations taken in over 100 countries around the world. Our qualifications are recognised by the relevant professional membership bodies including the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM).

NEBOSH is an awarding body to be recognised and regulated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

Where appropriate, NEBOSH follows the latest version of the *"GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice"* published by the regulatory authorities in relation to examination setting and marking. While not obliged to adhere to this code, NEBOSH regards it as best practice to do so.

Candidates' scripts are marked by a team of Examiners appointed by NEBOSH on the basis of their qualifications and experience. The standard of the qualification is determined by NEBOSH, which is overseen by the NEBOSH Council comprising nominees from, amongst others, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH). Representatives of course providers, from both the public and private sectors, are elected to the NEBOSH Council.

This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to candidates and tutors in preparation for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content and the application of assessment criteria.

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General comments

Many candidates are well prepared for this unit assessment and provide comprehensive and relevant answers in response to the demands of the question paper. This includes the ability to demonstrate understanding of knowledge by applying it to workplace situations.

There are always some candidates, however, who appear to be unprepared for the unit assessment and who show both a lack of knowledge of the syllabus content and a lack of understanding of how key concepts should be applied to workplace situations.

In order to meet the pass standard for this assessment, acquisition of knowledge and understanding across the syllabus are prerequisites. However, candidates need to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in answering the questions set. Referral of candidates in this unit is invariably because they are unable to write a full, well-informed answer to one or more of the questions asked.

Some candidates find it difficult to relate their learning to the questions and as a result offer responses reliant on recalled knowledge and conjecture and fail to demonstrate a sufficient degree of understanding. Candidates should prepare themselves for this vocational examination by ensuring their understanding, not rote-learning pre-prepared answers.

Candidates should therefore note that Examiners' Reports are **not** written to provide 'sample answers' but to give examples of what Examiners were expecting and more specifically to highlight areas of under performance.

Common pitfalls

It is recognised that many candidates are well prepared for their assessments. However, recurrent issues, as outlined below, continue to prevent some candidates reaching their full potential in the assessment.

- Many candidates fail to apply the basic principles of examination technique and for some candidates this means the difference between a pass and a referral.
- In some instances, candidates do not attempt all the required questions or are failing to provide complete answers. Candidates are advised to always attempt an answer to a compulsory question, even when the mind goes blank. Applying basic health and safety management principles can generate credit worthy points.
- Some candidates fail to answer the question set and instead provide information that may be relevant to the topic but is irrelevant to the question and cannot therefore be awarded marks.
- Many candidates fail to apply the command words (also known as action verbs, eg describe, outline, etc). Command words are the instructions that guide the candidate on the depth of answer required. If, for instance, a question asks the candidate to 'describe' something, then few marks will be awarded to an answer that is an outline. Similarly the command word 'identify' requires more information than a 'list'.
- Some candidates fail to separate their answers into the different sub-sections of the questions. These candidates could gain marks for the different sections if they clearly indicated which part of the question they were answering (by using the numbering from the question in their answer, for example). Structuring their answers to address the different parts of the question can also help in logically drawing out the points to be made in response.
- Candidates need to plan their time effectively. Some candidates fail to make good use of their time and give excessive detail in some answers leaving insufficient time to address all of the questions.
- Candidates should also be aware that Examiners cannot award marks if handwriting is illegible.
- Candidates should note that it is not necessary to start a new page in their answer booklet for each section of a question.

UNIT B – Hazardous agents in the workplace

Section A – *all questions compulsory*

Question 1

(a) ***Outline*** *the meaning of the term 'vocational rehabilitation'.* ***(2)***

(b) ***Outline*** *the benefits of vocational rehabilitation to the employer.* ***(5)***

(c) ***Identify THREE*** *health care practitioners who may be involved in the vocational rehabilitation of an employee.* ***(3)***

This question is based on a new area of the Unit B syllabus (element B11) and most candidates coped well with it. When outlining the meaning of vocational rehabilitation in part (a), candidates needed to include reference to the help given to someone returning to work following either injury or illness. The definition of vocational rehabilitation also includes those remaining in work or accessing work following injury or illness.

Candidates struggled more when responding to part (b). To be awarded all the marks available, they needed to include a wide range of benefits to the employer. Most responses included benefits such as reduced sickness absence costs and improved productivity. Few candidates, however, referred to other benefits of vocational rehabilitation such as retention of skilled employees or demonstration of compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

Candidates did well in part (c) of the question. Examples of health care practitioners involved in vocational rehabilitation were occupational doctors and occupational nurses. Other options were counsellors or occupational therapists. There were a number of other mark-worthy examples that candidates could have referred to.

Question 2

Employees can be exposed to corrosive substances.

(a) ***Give*** *the meaning of the term 'corrosive'.* ***(2)***

(b) *The data below, for three forms of the same product, is taken from a supplier's catalogue.*

Using the data ***outline*** *the likely routes of entry* ***AND*** *effects of exposure when handling* ***EACH*** *of these products.* ***(8)***

Product code	Chemical name/formula	Concentration	Physical form
C1	Sodium Hydroxide (NaOH)	99.9%	Pellets
C2	Sodium Hydroxide (NaOH)	97%	Powder
C3	Sodium Hydroxide (NaOH)	50% in water	Liquid

In part (a), candidates were specifically asked to give the meaning of the term '*corrosive*'. This phrasing in a question indicates that a clear and precise definition of a

term is required. In element B1 of the syllabus, a number of terms are listed for which candidates are expected to know the meaning, eg toxic irritant, carcinogenic etc. One of the terms listed in the syllabus is corrosive. Candidates were expected to refer to a corrosive substance as one that results in the destruction of living tissue if inhaled, ingested or on contact.

To gain all the range of marks available in part (b), candidates needed to address both aspects of the question which were to outline the likely routes of entry **and** the effects of exposure for **each** of the products listed in the table. Candidates who did well on this part of the question organised their answers in a way that methodically addressed these two aspects of the question for each of the three products. Some candidates did not structure their answers and so limited their ability to be awarded marks. Sometimes they missed out a likely route of entry for one product or an effect of exposure for another product.

For example, a candidate gaining good marks indicated that product C2 being a powder, the most likely route of entry would be via inhalation; therefore the effects of exposure to C2 would be in the respiratory tract. Credit would also be given to candidates who suggested that the powder C2 when airborne could also affect the eyes and skin.

Candidates are encouraged to structure answers in a way that addresses all the points signposted in the question.

Question 3

(a) ***Outline*** *the source* ***AND*** *symptoms of meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).* ***(4)***

(b) ***Outline*** *control measures that can be used to minimise the risks from MRSA in a hospital environment.* ***(6)***

The Unit B syllabus has always included a list of biological agents that candidates are expected to have studied. Responses to this question indicated that some accredited course providers may not have noted the changes in this list, following the recent syllabus update; therefore some candidates did not have knowledge of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). In these cases, the candidates tried to apply knowledge from other biological agents such as Hepatitis B and Leptospirosis to this question and as a result were awarded low marks.

In part (a), candidates needed to outline that the source of MRSA was human as it is found in about a third of healthy people. When outlining symptoms, candidates need to avoid vague phrases such as “flu-like symptoms”. The more specific symptoms relevant to this biological agent include local skin infection, boils, serious wound infections as well as high temperature, pain and body aches. Those candidates who had clearly studied this particular biological agent also noted that some people can carry this bacterium, but show no symptoms (referred to as colonisation).

Control measures that candidates should have outlined in part (b) included those that are relevant to many bacteria in a health care situation. For example, hand washing with soap and water or alcohol hand gel and the wearing of gloves and aprons. Most candidates gained marks in this way. Few candidates, however, were able to outline control measures specific to MRSA. These include: identifying patients who carry MRSA by taking swabs and sending them to a laboratory for analysis; treating patients with antibiotics prior to hospital admission; and cleaning of clinical areas and equipment. Tutors can find further specific advice on control measures for MRSA in Health Protection Agency guidance.

Question 4 *A Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV) system is used to reduce exposure of workers to dust in a workplace.*

(a) ***Identify THREE*** *visual inspection methods that could be used to give a simple qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of the LEV system.* ***(3)***

(b) *Transport velocity is one of the quantitative measurements undertaken to assess the performance of the LEV system.*

(i) ***Outline*** *why transport velocity is an important parameter to measure when assessing the effectiveness of the LEV system.* ***(2)***

(ii) ***Outline*** *the methods that can be used to measure transport velocity in a LEV system.* ***(5)***

A similar question to this has been included in previous Unit B examination question papers; therefore candidates were well prepared to respond. Part (a) required candidates to identify visual inspection methods that provide qualitative (rather than quantitative) results. Suitable methods included the use of equipment such as a tyndall beam or more simply, observations on the build of dust on surfaces in the workplace.

In part (b), transport velocity was selected as an example of a quantitative measurement of LEV performance. This is an important parameter because an insufficient transport velocity can result in dust particles settling in the duct and lead to a blockage of the duct. As well as reducing the overall efficiency of the LEV system, there is an increased fire or explosion risk.

Responses to part (b) (ii) were often inaccurate with candidates incorrectly naming the equipment used to measure transport velocity. Candidates did need to provide accurate information in order to gain the marks available. Suitable equipment included a thermal or hot-wire anemometer or a pitot-static tube attached to a pressure gauge (manometer). In addition, candidates were expected to outline the use of this equipment and the calculation of transport velocity. Candidates who have seen and perhaps used this equipment would be better placed to answer this question, so tutors should try to provide candidates with this opportunity.

Question 5 *Display lasers are used in a night club.*

Outline *the control measures that should be put in place to minimise the risks to people in the night club from the display lasers.* ***(10)***

Many candidates performed poorly on this new question. The revised diploma syllabus includes more detail on lasers and, in particular, reference to typical workplace situations (including leisure and entertainment) and practical control measures. Both these parts of the syllabus were the basis for this question. Tutors are directed towards the HSE publication HSG 95.

Candidates were able to gain some marks by applying basic hierarchy of control ideas and as a result should have included in their responses reference to protective housing for the laser system, maintenance of safe distances around areas where there are hazardous emissions and the use of warning signs. At diploma level, more technical detail about control measures was necessary to gain the range of marks available.

Few candidates referred to control measures such as masking around the laser aperture to restrict errant beams or positioning of lasers to avoid reflection from any reflective surfaces in the night club.

A number of candidates wasted time explaining the various classes of lasers that the question did not require. A simple reference to the need to use the lowest power (or class) of laser possible was mark-worthy, although in reality in this setting, this is unlikely to be a Class 1 laser and is more likely to be Class 3 or 4.

Most candidates were unaware of the importance of the Maximum Permissible Exposure (MPE) for lasers. A safe display laser installation should have emissions that do not expose people above the applicable Maximum Permissible Exposure value, even when reasonably foreseeable faults occur.

Other controls that candidates could have included were the appointment of a laser safety officer, the use of trained and competent people to install and operate the laser display equipment and adequate supervision during the operation of the lasers.

Question 6 *Stonemasons cutting and finishing stone are exposed to silica dust.*

Outline** factors to be considered when undertaking a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks from exposure to silica dust.* ***(10)

This question was generally not well answered.

Marks were available for factors such as the likely route of entry, the possible health effects of silica dust and the particle size of the dust. Any risk assessment for a hazardous substance has to take account of the frequency of exposure, the number of people exposed and the duration of their exposure.

As the question was based on a particular scenario of stonemasons cutting and finishing stone, there were marks available for consideration of how the nature of the work could affect the exposure to silica dust. For example the use of power tools to do the work could result in larger quantities of dust being generated, unless existing controls measures such as dust extraction were available.

An outline of what else is relevant to making a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for a hazardous substance such as silica dust, can be found within the ACOP (approved code of practice) that accompanies the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH).

Section B – *three from five questions to be attempted*

Question 7 *The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require every workplace to have suitable and sufficient lighting.*

Outline** factors that should be considered when providing suitable and sufficient workplace lighting.* ***(20)

This was not a popular choice of question, perhaps because this is another new topic within the Unit B syllabus. This was previously included within the Unit C syllabus.

Those candidates who answered this question did not perform well and the average mark achieved was well under half marks. There was a very wide range of factors that candidates could have included in their responses and only a small number of these are mentioned here. Tutors are directed to the HSE guidance document HSG38.

The provision of suitable and sufficient lighting should consider general, localised and local lighting requirements, the avoidance of glare and shadows, as well as accessibility of lighting controls and requirements for maintenance. Other factors that candidates should have included in their answer were the colour and frequency (in Hertz) of the lighting. Those who noted that lighting levels are measured in lux were given credit.

Candidates are advised that questions that are not broken down into parts benefit from some planning before starting to respond. This avoids duplication of points and helps candidates to ensure they cover a wide range of factors.

Question 8 *(a)* *The Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 set exposure values.*

***Give** the meaning of the terms:*

(i) *Exposure Limit Value (ELV);* ***(2)***

(ii) *Exposure Action Value (EAV).* ***(2)***

(b) *A building contractor has been asked to remove a large area of concrete paving using a hand-held concrete breaker. The concrete breaker has a vibration magnitude of 10m/s^2. The site manager estimates it will take approximately 4 hours for one worker to complete this task.*

*Using the information above and the Health and Safety Executive 'Vibration calculator' below, **explain** a range of practical steps the site manager could consider when determining how to complete this task with the existing equipment to comply with the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005.* ***(10)***

Vibration magnitude m/s²	15 mins	30 mins	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	5 hours	6 hours	8 hours	10 hours
40	800									
30	450	900								
25	315	625	1250							
20	200	400	800							
19	180	360	720	1450						
18	160	325	650	1300						
17	145	290	580	1150						
16	130	255	510	1000						
15	115	225	450	900	1350					
14	98	195	390	785	1200					
13	85	170	340	675	1000	1350				
12	72	145	290	575	865	1150	1450			
11	61	120	240	485	725	970	1200	1450		
10	50	100	200	400	600	800	1000	1200		
9	41	81	160	325	485	650	810	970	1300	
8	32	64	130	255	385	510	640	770	1000	1200
7	25	49	98	195	295	390	490	590	785	865
6	18	36	72	145	215	290	360	430	575	720
5.5	15	30	61	120	180	240	305	365	485	605
5	13	25	50	100	150	200	250	300	400	500
4.5	10	20	41	81	120	160	205	245	325	405
4	8	16	32	64	96	130	160	190	255	320
3.5	6	12	25	49	74	98	125	145	195	245
3	5	9	18	36	54	72	90	110	145	180
2.5	3	6	13	25	38	50	63	75	100	125
2	2	4	8	16	24	32	40	48	64	80
1.5	1	2	5	9	14	18	23	27	36	45
1	1	1	2	4	6	8	10	12	16	20

Daily exposure time

(c) ***Outline*** *other control measures that the site manager could put in place for similar work in the future.* ***(6)***

Part (a) required candidates to give the meaning of two specific technical terms relevant to exposure to vibration. Both these legal terms are specifically defined within the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 and therefore responses needed to be accurate. Since these levels of exposure are a dose, the meaning of the terms '*Exposure Limit Value (ELV')* and '*Exposure Action Value (EAV)'* require reference to the time period of exposure (daily). Candidates who quoted numerical values for ELV and EAV as part of their response gained marks only if the correct numbers were accompanied by the correct units, m/s^2 A(8).

In part (b) of this question, candidates were specifically asked to determine how to complete the task using the existing equipment, so those who mentioned using alternative work equipment or methods were not given credit.

There were options on how to complete the task and comply with the Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005. For example, the site manager could use more than two operatives each working for less than 30 minutes a day and then all would receive a vibration exposure that was below the Exposure Action Value (represented by 100 points on the calculator). Other permutations of numbers of operators and time spent working with the equipment were possible and these also gained marks.

Some candidates commented in their answers that the HSE calculator had not been reproduced on the examination question paper in colour and therefore they were not able to utilise the information to answer the question. The colour version of the

calculator that is found in HSE publications is a presentational tool to aid use. The colours are not necessary to utilise the numerical data in the calculator. It is expected that as part of the studying the use of the HSE Vibration calculator (a specific requirement in element 6.5 of the revised diploma syllabus), candidates will note the point values that represent the ELV and EAV. Candidates with this knowledge were able to use the calculator to help them answer parts (b) and (c).

Responses to part (c) required candidates to think about control measures that could be used in the future and these could include the use of alternative work methods of equipment. Some candidates continued to utilise the information provided in the HSE calculator to determine that selecting equipment with a vibration magnitude of less than 4 m/s^2 would allow one operative to complete the 4 hour task in one day and still receive a vibration exposure below the EAV. Other relevant control measures included maintenance of the concrete breaking equipment and the use of such equipment with heated hand grips to improve blood circulation in the hands of the operatives.

Overall this was a popular choice of question and most candidates provided reasonable responses.

Question 9 *Employees working in a busy 24 hour Accident and Emergency Department of a city centre hospital are exposed to the risk of workplace violence and aggression.*

(a) ***Outline*** *factors that will increase the likelihood of these employees experiencing workplace violence and aggression.* ***(6)***

(b) ***Outline*** *a range of practical controls that the hospital could introduce to minimise the risks to these employees from workplace violence and aggression.* ***(10)***

(c) *A nurse is violently attacked by a relative of a patient they are treating and acts to defend herself.*

Explain *the legal criteria that would be considered when deciding if the nurse had acted within the law in these circumstances.* ***(4)***

Candidates were able to answers parts (a) and (b) of this question well. However, responses to part (c) were poor. Fortunately, the bulk of the 20 marks were for parts (a) and (b), so on average, candidates attempting this question gained half marks.

Factors that increase the likelihood of employees in an Accident and Emergency department experiencing violence and aggression include dealing with members of the public in close proximity, in situations when they are in pain or distress and may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Other organisational factors such as waiting times and lack of communication are also relevant.

In part (b), candidates needed to outline practical control measures for the Accident and Emergency department. It seemed that many candidates were able to draw on personal experience to provide examples of control measures that were very relevant to the scenario. Control measures within the work environment included CCTV, removal of potential missiles by fixing chairs etc to the floor and physical barriers at reception desks. Other organisational control measures included training of employees in managing violent situations, improved communication on waiting times, post-incident counselling and support for employees who want to press charges against assailants.

Responses to part (c) were poor. Element 8.4 of the revised diploma syllabus is the basis for this question. Candidates were expected to have some knowledge of the

Criminal Law Act 1967 section 3 (listed in the statutory provisions for element 8) and be able to explain its relevance in the situation described in the question. Part (c) required reference to the Criminal Law Act 1967 and explanation of term '*reasonable force*'. For the nurse to have acted with reasonable force when defending herself, it would be necessary to determine that the force was necessary in the circumstances and that the force that was used was reasonable. A number of candidates mistakenly cited the Health and Safety at Work Act as being relevant to the use of self-defence.

Question 10 *A parcel sorting depot is experiencing a high number of manual handling related injuries. The employees handle a large number of different parcels and packages each day.*

(a) ***Identify*** *the different types of hazard that may be inherent in the loads being handled.* ***(6)***

(b) *In order to reduce the level of manual handling required, the employer has decided to invest in a range of non-powered handling devices such as trolleys and trucks.*

Outline *factors the employer should consider when selecting suitable devices.* ***(10)***

(c) ***Outline*** *a range of additional control measures that could be introduced to minimise the risks associated with these manual handling activities.* ***(4)***

This was an extremely popular question and candidates who answered this question performed well. In part (a), most candidates easily identified the hazards associated with the loads being handled, although some did stray from the question and included hazards associated with the task and the environment. These were not required.

Some candidates answering part (b) did not focus on the word in italics (*selecting)* and concentrated on the use of the devices, so limiting their marks. In order to be awarded the 10 marks available candidates needed to outline a wide range of factors. These included a suitable safe working load, the need for brakes, devices to be lightweight and height adjustable. More features of the design of the devices were relevant to consider, but are not listed here.

Since the question was about selection, credit was given to candidates who mentioned the importance of user trials and employee involvement in the selection process. Other factors to consider related to the environment in which the devices were to operate, for example sufficient width to manoeuvre the devices.

In part (c), candidates needed to consider options beyond the use of the trolleys and trucks in part (b). Therefore marks were awarded for additional control measures such as changing the layout of the workplace to reduce twisting, stooping, carrying distances etc. The use of mechanical assistance such as forklift trucks was also relevant. As is often the case the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is a valid control measure. Diploma level candidates should always be certain to include a relevant example of PPE and not just mention the generic term PPE, to be awarded the mark.

Question 11 *A manufacturing process involves the use of a solvent which has a Workplace Exposure Limit (WEL).*

(a) ***Explain*** *what is meant by the term WEL and how it relates to the term "adequate control" as defined in the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002.* ***(5)***

(b) ***Outline*** *a range of methods and equipment that could be used to measure the personal exposure of the process workers to this solvent.* ***(7)***

(c) *Exposure of the process workers to this solvent is controlled by local exhaust ventilation (LEV) and personal protective equipment (PPE). The LEV system is regularly inspected and is subject to thorough examination and testing on an annual basis.*

Using results from personal exposure measurements and information relating to the control measures in use, ***outline*** *how you could determine if the process workers' exposure to this solvent is adequately controlled.* ***(8)***

Part (a) of this question required candidates to have specific knowledge of the term WEL and the meaning of '*adequate control'* as both terms have particular meanings within the COSHH Regulations. When explaining the term WEL, it is always necessary to include reference to the relevant time frames (ie 15 minutes and 8 hours). Adequate control is not only achieved if the WEL is not exceeded and the principles of good practice are met. Credit was given to candidates who mentioned the additional requirements for carcinogens, mutagens and asthmagens.

Part (b) was particularly poorly answered. Understanding of the methods used to measure personal exposure to hazardous substances is a perennial problem in Unit B answers. When candidates are asked to provide information on how to do this, there is often a lack of knowledge and understanding. Tutors are encouraged to give candidates practical experience of using such equipment in order to improve their understanding and reduce confusion about the various methods available.

The methods that are required in response to part (b) are concerned with measuring personal exposure. Instead, many candidates talked about static sampling within the work environment. Tutors are directed to the relevant MDHS documents on the HSE website (Methods for Determining Hazardous Substances), that describe the methodologies for measuring exposure to solvents. Whilst candidates were not expected to have detailed knowledge about the name/number of these MDHS documents, use of these documents when studying this area of the syllabus is helpful.

In part (c), many candidates did not show understanding about how to use the results from personal exposure monitoring along with data on local exhaust ventilation (LEV) performance and personal protective equipment (PPE) specifications. Clearly it was necessary to compare the results of personal exposure monitoring with the relevant WEL. The results of LEV testing compared with the commissioning data for the LEV system could indicate a drop in LEV performance over time, which may result in the control of exposure deteriorating. Other comparisons in relation to PPE or RPE specification and personal exposure monitoring results were also mark-worthy.

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