



**APTA SS-SRM-RP-007-12, Rev. 1**

First Published: December 1, 2012

First Revision: May 10, 2023

Security Emergency Management  
Working Group

# Recognizing and Responding to Unattended Packages, Objects and Baggage

**Abstract:** This recommended practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended packages, objects and baggage.

**Keywords:** baggage, object, package, suspicious, unattended

**Summary:** Transit employees are the eyes and ears of an agency's operations and services and play a vital role in the safety and security of passengers and fellow employees. This recommended practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended packages, objects and baggage within the transit system.

**Scope and purpose:** This recommended practice is applicable to all transit agencies, regardless of size or mode. It is not intended to substitute for federal, state or local laws and regulatory requirements. This document offers a baseline set of recommendations to assist transit agencies in their recognition of and response to unattended items. This document complements APTA's recommended practice "Identifying Suspicious Behavior in Mass Transit," which was updated in 2022. The purpose of this document is to provide transit agencies with broad guidelines for evolving their own policies and procedures for instructing employees in recognizing and responding to items that are unattended. This document also is intended to enhance the security awareness of transit employees by providing procedures for recognizing and responding to unattended items.

This document represents a common viewpoint of those parties concerned with its provisions, namely transit operating/planning agencies, manufacturers, consultants, engineers and general interest groups. The application of any recommended practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. APTA standards are mandatory to the extent incorporated by an applicable statute or regulation. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a transit system's operations. In cases where there is a conflict or contradiction between an applicable law or regulation and this document, consult with a legal adviser to determine which document takes precedence.

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## Introduction

*This introduction is not part of APTA SS-SRM-RP-007-12, Rev. 1, "Recognizing and Responding to Unattended Packages, Objects and Baggage."*

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

- individuals or organizations that operate rail transit systems;
- individuals or organizations that contract with others for the operation of rail transit systems; and
- individuals or organizations that influence how rail transit systems are operated (including but not limited to consultants, designers and contractors).

# Recognizing and Responding to Unattended Packages, Objects and Baggage

## 1. Overview

This recommended practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended packages, objects and baggage. Throughout this document, the term “item” will be used to describe packages, objects and baggage. Transit employees are considered the eyes and ears of an agency’s operations and services and play a vital role in the safety and security of passengers and fellow employees. Moreover, programs such as the “See Something, Say Something” and TSA “Not On My Watch” security awareness campaigns educate employees and passengers on how to recognize and respond to unattended items. This recommended practice includes criteria for recognizing characteristics of unattended items. The policies and procedures developed by transit agencies to instruct employees may include the following criteria for the recognition of and response to unattended items:

- procedures to follow upon observing unattended items within the transit system
- procedures to follow upon identifying unattended items
- procedures on how to properly communicate suspicious items to other transit personnel; local, state and federal law enforcement; and other appropriate agencies
- procedures on emergency egress paths, exit locations and emergency equipment use

## 2. Guidelines on unattended items

Each transit agency should create guidelines and instructions on employee recognition of, response to and reporting of unattended items. Agencies should conduct a review of their current policies and procedures and create guidelines and instructions that coincide with the security goals and potential threats identified by the organization. Coordination with transit security/police and/or local law enforcement officials will ensure a unified approach and facilitate collaborative efforts if warranted by the circumstances surrounding the discovered and reported unattended item.

Guidelines on recognition of, response to and reporting of unattended items are provided in this document. TSA periodically develops awareness materials and images for internal transit agency and public release.

Security awareness training and exercises should include guidance on recognizing and responding to unattended items. See APTA-SS-SRM-RP-005-12, “Security Awareness Training for Transit Employees,” and APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, “Transit Exercises,” for more information.

### 2.1 General guidelines for determining which items are suspicious

All transit agency employees play a vital role in ensuring the safety and security of every person within the transit system. Employees must remain alert for unattended items located within the transit system. Suspicion is based on place, circumstances and time. Not all unattended items are suspicious items. Generally anything that is Hidden, Obviously suspicious and not Typical (HOT) should be deemed suspicious.

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In this context, employees should recognize the following as suspicious:

- any unattended item inconsistent to that location (e.g., a suitcase at a non-airport bus or train station)
- any unattended item located in an out-of-the-way place where it is not readily visible or appears purposely concealed
- any unattended item that matches something described in a reported threat or has a threatening note attached
- any unattended item that has visible wires, batteries, a clock or timer, bottles, tanks, or bags attached
- any unattended item that is abandoned by someone quickly leaving the area
- any unattended item emitting an odor, mist or oily liquid, or leaking a powdery substance

## **2.2 Responding to suspicious items**

If an immediate threat is perceived, employees should remain calm and encourage evacuation from the affected area.

**NOTE:** An immediate threat could include but is not limited to an incident in which an employee observes two or more people becoming similarly disabled (e.g., seizure, convulsions, breathing difficulties, loss of consciousness) with no other obvious cause(s) (e.g., smoke condition, pepper spray).











Employees should consider the following guidelines for recognizing or responding to suspicious or unattended items:

- Do not touch an item that has been deemed suspicious.
- Do not use a radio or cell phone if an explosive device is suspected. It is recommended that no calls or transmissions be made within a distance of 300 ft from the device. In a transit environment, it is recommended that employees and customers use a landline, such as a blue light or in-house phone, instead of wireless communications.
- Adhere to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) guidance for stand-off distances (see **Figure 1**).
- Immediately make notifications through appropriate channels, providing your name, location and a description of the items.
- Be prepared to provide security and/or law enforcement arriving on scene with descriptions of the object, the location of the object, the suspicious nature of the object and, if applicable, a description of any people associated with the object.

Also consider the following steps:

- Leave the area as quickly as possible, and do not attempt to lend assistance if doing so delays your own escape. Do not reenter the area once you have evacuated everyone.
- Advise employees or customers not to enter the affected area.
- Don personal protective equipment (if provided by the agency)
- Await direction from a supervisor, control center, police or emergency responders.

**FIGURE 1**  
 CISA Bomb Threat Stand-Off Chart

|                       |   |                     |                               |                       |                               |
|---|---|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Threat Description  |  | Explosives Capacity | Mandatory Evacuation Distance | Shelter-in-Place Zone | Preferred Evacuation Distance |
|  Pipe Bomb             |   | 5 lbs               | 70 ft                         | 71-1199 ft            | +1200 ft                      |
|  Suicide Bomber        |   | 20 lbs              | 110 ft                        | 111-1699 ft           | +1700 ft                      |
|  Briefcase/Suitcase    |   | 50 lbs              | 150 ft                        | 151-1849 ft           | +1850 ft                      |
|  Car                   |   | 500 lbs             | 320 ft                        | 321-1899 ft           | +1900 ft                      |
|  SUV/Van               |   | 1,000 lbs           | 400 ft                        | 401-2399 ft           | +2400 ft                      |
|  Small Delivery Truck  |   | 4,000 lbs           | 640 ft                        | 641-3799 ft           | +3800 ft                      |
|  Container/Water Truck |   | 10,000 lbs          | 860 ft                        | 861-5099 ft           | +5100 ft                      |
|  Semi-Trailer          |   | 60,000 lbs          | 1570 ft                       | 1571-9299 ft          | +9300 ft                      |

**DEFEND TODAY, SECURE TOMORROW**

### 2.3 Contacting the TSOC (Freedom Center)

If a transit agency encounters a potential disruption or an actual disruption in service due to a suspicious unattended package, the agency should notify TSA’s Transportation Security Operation Center (TSOC)—also called the Freedom Center—immediately in accordance with established practices and procedures. The TSOC serves as a 24/7 point of contact for all transportation security concerns related to all modes of transportation, including mass transit operations. In such a situation, the transit agency should contact the TSOC surface watch officer at 1-866-615-5150 and [TSOC.St@dhs.gov](mailto:TSOC.St@dhs.gov). In doing so, the transit agency should attempt to provide information that is accurate and detailed, and be prepared to provide the following information:

- transit agency name, date, time and place of observations
- extent of potential or actual disruption (e.g., number of affected bus routes, rail lines and stations)
- a complete description of unattended package(s) and any related suspicious activity
- description of suspicious odor emanating from the unattended package (if applicable)
- description of suspicious person or vehicle, including license plate number, color, make, model, dents or damage (if applicable)

For further information on reporting significant security concerns, see 49 CFR §1570.203 (2022).

### 3. Suspicious item training and information resources

Transit agencies have access to multiple resources from various organizations. The following resources have been developed by the DHS Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), FBI, TSA, and the National Transit Institute (NTI) in conjunction with the FTA.

#### 3.1 CISA resources

The Department of Homeland Security, working in partnership with other agencies, offers a wide range of resources throughout its various components. For examples, the CISA Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP) leads DHS efforts to implement the National Policy for Countering Improvised Explosive Devices (National Counter-IED policy) and enhance the nation’s ability to prevent, protect against, respond to, and mitigate the use of explosives against critical infrastructure; the private sector; and federal, state, local, tribal and territorial entities. OBP provides several resources, such as bomb checklists and identifiers for unattended packages.

**Figure 2** shows CISA’s “What to Do: Suspicious or Unattended Item” video training (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r13iJlFTFC0>), and **Figure 3** shows DHS’s “Suspicious or Unattended?” security poster.

**FIGURE 2**  
DHS CISA Video Training

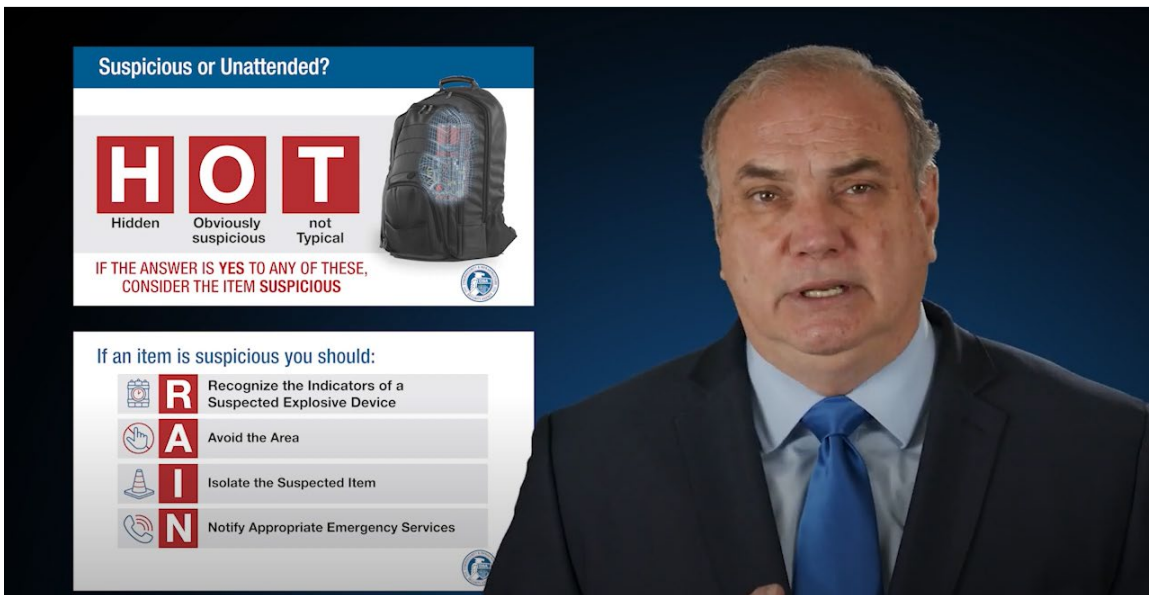


FIGURE 3  
 DHS Poster



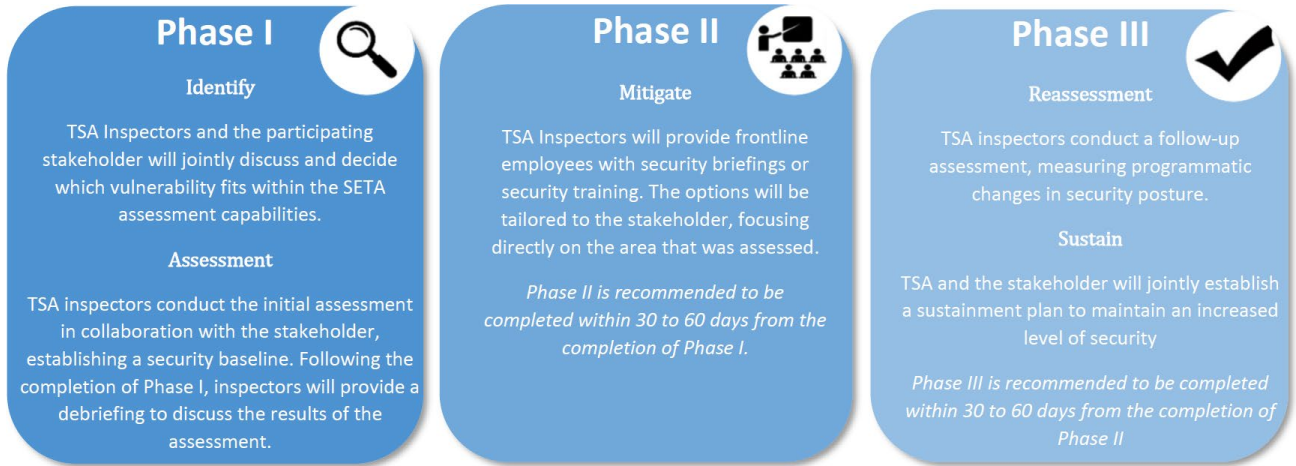
### 3.2 TSA resources

TSA offers several different resources and trainings related to unattended baggage. For example, the TSA Security Enhancement Through Assessment (SETA) program (see Figure 4) is a no-cost, collaborative, voluntary program designed to evaluate and improve a surface transportation stakeholder's vehicle inspection procedures. A tactical level assessment, SETA consists of covertly placing unattended bags on multiple vehicles simultaneously to simulate a coordinated terrorist attack. TSA may also be able to provide transit agencies training on unattended baggage via local Transportation Surface Inspectors (TSIs) and Transportation Security Specialists for Explosives (TSSEs).



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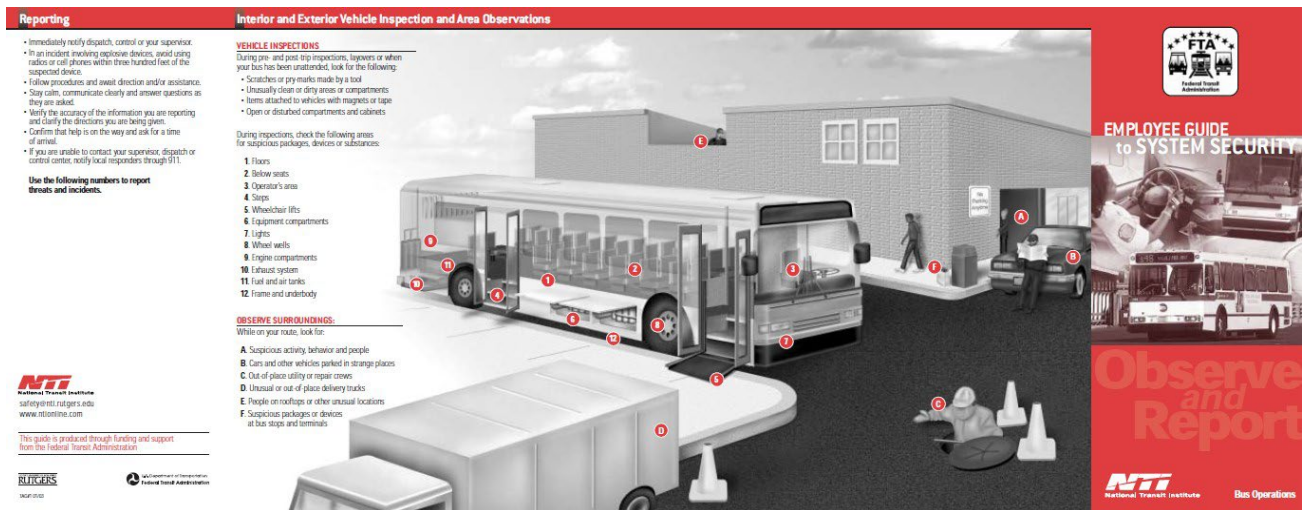
**FIGURE 4**  
**SETA “Multiphase Approach” Training**



**3.3 NTI resources**




NTI published the pocket guides shown in **Figure 5**, **Figure 6** and **Figure 7** to increase awareness.

**FIGURE 5**  
**NTI’s “Bus Operations” Pocket Guide**

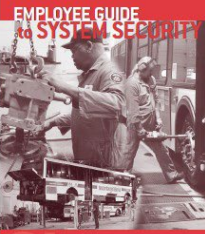



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**FIGURE 6**  
**NTI's "Commuter Bus and Terminal" Pocket Guide**

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immediately notify dispatch, control or your supervisor.</li> <li>In an incident involving explosive devices, avoid using radios or cell phones within three hundred feet of the suspected device.</li> <li>Follow procedures and await direction and/or assistance.</li> <li>Stay calm, communicate clearly and answer questions as they are asked.</li> <li>Verify the accuracy of the information you are reporting and clarify the directions you are being given.</li> <li>Confirm that help is on the way and ask for a time of arrival.</li> <li>If you are unable to contact your supervisor, dispatch or control center, notify local responders through 911.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use the following numbers to report threats and incidents.</b></p> | <p><b>Security Sweeps</b></p> <p>Continually monitoring operations and areas will help reduce the risk of security threats and incidents. During pre and post trip inspections, operators or when your bus has been unattended, look for the following signs of vehicle tampering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scratches or pry marks made by a tool</li> <li>Unusually clean or dirty areas or compartments</li> <li>Items attached to vehicle with magnets or tape</li> <li>Open or disabled compartments and cabinets</li> </ul> <p>Be alert for suspicious activity, packages, devices, substances and conditions along the route, on the bus and in terminals or facilities.</p> <p><b>BUSES</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Floors</li> <li>Below seats</li> <li>Operator's area</li> <li>Steps</li> <li>Restrooms</li> <li>Luggage compartments</li> <li>Lights</li> <li>Wheel wells</li> <li>Engine compartments</li> <li>Fuel tank system</li> <li>Fuel tanks</li> <li>Frame and underbody</li> </ol> <p><b>TERMINALS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benches and seats</li> <li>Trash receptacles</li> <li>Phone stations</li> <li>Phone stations</li> <li>Vending machines</li> <li>Ticket windows</li> <li>TVM machines</li> <li>Saunways</li> <li>Storage lockers</li> <li>Restrooms</li> <li>Food and convenience vendors</li> <li>Bus shelters and platforms</li> </ol> |  <p><b>EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY</b></p>  <p><b>Observe and Report</b></p>  <p>Commuter Bus &amp; Terminal</p> |
|---|---|---|

**FIGURE 7**  
**NTI's "Bus Maintenance" Pocket Guide**

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immediately notify your supervisor.</li> <li>In an incident involving explosive devices, avoid using radios or cell phones within three hundred feet of the suspected device.</li> <li>Follow procedures and await direction and/or assistance.</li> <li>Stay calm, communicate clearly and answer questions as they are asked.</li> <li>Verify the accuracy of the information you are reporting and clarify the directions you are being given.</li> <li>Confirm that help is on the way and ask for a time of arrival.</li> <li>If you are unable to contact your supervisor, notify local responders through 911.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use the following numbers to report threats and incidents.</b></p> | <p><b>Security Sweeps</b></p> <p>When receiving or releasing vehicles look for suspicious packages, devices, wires, substances and signs of tampering. In particular, check the engine compartment for foreign objects or a false compartment in the air filter area and additional wires from the battery. Inspect the fuel and air tanks for inconsistent and missing connections.</p> <p>Signs of vehicle tampering include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scratches or marks made by tools</li> <li>Unusually clean or dirty compartments</li> <li>Items attached to vehicles or objects with magnets or duct tape</li> <li>Open or disabled compartments and cabinets</li> </ul> <p>Continually check the following areas for suspicious activity, packages, devices, and substances:</p> <p><b>BUS INTERIOR</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Floors</li> <li>Above, on and below seats</li> <li>Operator's area</li> <li>Steps</li> <li>Wheelchair lift/ramp</li> <li>Interior compartments</li> </ol> <p><b>BUS EXTERIOR</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access panels</li> <li>Bike rack</li> <li>Wheel wells</li> <li>Engine compartment</li> <li>Bus frame and underbody</li> <li>Saunway system</li> <li>Fuel tanks</li> <li>Roof-top equipment</li> </ol> <p><b>MAINTENANCE SHOP</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Out of place items</li> <li>Parts inventory</li> </ol> <p>On commuter buses, also check interior and exterior luggage compartments and lavatories.</p> |  <p><b>EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY</b></p>  <p><b>Observe and Report</b></p>  <p>Bus Maintenance</p> |
|--|--|--|

## **Related APTA standards**

**APTA SS-SRM-RP-005-12**, “Security Awareness Training for Transit Employees”

**APTA SS-SRM-RP-009-09**, “Identifying Suspicious Behavior in Mass Transit”

**APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09**, “Transit Exercises”

**APTA SS-SEM-S-009-09**, “Emergency Communication Strategies for Transit Agencies”

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## **Definitions**

**item:** A package, object or piece of baggage that can be of virtually any size. It can be found anywhere and may have been placed intentionally or unintentionally.

**suspicious item:** An unattended package, object or piece of baggage that raises feelings of wariness or distrust because it is out of the ordinary for the time, place or circumstances. Suspicious items include those that are witnessed to have been purposely abandoned, are left in a secured area, or whose existence cannot be logically explained. Whether the size of an envelope or a suitcase, a suspicious item may conceal a device capable of injuring people or disrupting service.

**Abbreviations and acronyms**

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>ATU</b>  | Amalgamated Transit Union                         |
| <b>DHS</b>  | Department of Homeland Security                   |
| <b>FBI</b>  | Federal Bureau of Investigation                   |
| <b>FTA</b>  | Federal Transit Administration                    |
| <b>HOT</b>  | Hidden, Obviously suspicious, and not Typical     |
| <b>NTI</b>  | National Transit Institute                        |
| <b>RAIN</b> | Recognize, Avoid, Isolate, Notify                 |
| <b>SETA</b> | Security Enhancement Through Assessment           |
| <b>TAR</b>  | Terrorist Activity Recognition and Reaction       |
| <b>TSA</b>  | Transportation Security Administration            |
| <b>TSI</b>  | Transportation Surface Inspector                  |
| <b>TSOC</b> | Transportation Security Operations Center         |
| <b>TSSE</b> | Transportation Security Specialist for Explosives |

**Document history**

| <b>Document Version</b> | <b>Working Group Vote</b> | <b>Public Comment/ Technical Oversight</b> | <b>Rail CEO Approval</b> | <b>Policy &amp; Planning Approval</b> | <b>Publish Date</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| First published         | —                         | —  | —                        | —                                     | Dec. 1, 2012        |
| First revision          | July 29, 2022             | December 1, 2022                           | March 6, 2023            | March 31, 2023                        | May 10, 2023        |