

Practical Protest Techniques

Using your body and a few simple tools to maximise your protest!

The aim of all the techniques in this briefing is to increase the length of time that you can remain at the site of an action and therefore hopefully increase the effectiveness of your protest, whether you are blocking the entrance to a military base, stopping a nuclear convoy or preventing trees being cut down.

Using your body

If you have nothing else to hand then the best thing you have is your own body weight. Sitting or lying down makes it much more difficult for security guards or police to push or move you away from the place where you want to be. You can increase this difficulty by *passively resisting* (see below). Co-operating with others can further increase your effectiveness:

Linking arms

Sit close together and link arms with your neighbours. The more of you that can link arms the better. Five or more people can block a single carriageway of a road. More than a dozen and you can block both carriageways! Link arms at the elbow and bring your hands in front of you. Take a tight hold of your own wrists or elbows. You are now a bit harder to move - the police will need to break your grip before they can pick you up and carry you away. If you're linked together in a line, the people at the end are more vulnerable, so you might want to consider sitting in a circle.

Linking arms and legs in a circle

Five or more people can form a circle then link arms as above. If everyone's facing inwards, the circle can be made more impregnable by jumbling up your legs as well. If your facing inwards you won't be able to see what's happening behind you. Work together with your group and act as each other's eyes and ears.

Passive resistance

Passive resistance is an age old protest technique used to slow down your removal from a protest once you have been arrested. To some people it's an ideological statement about not co-operating with the authorities. Essentially you simply relax your muscles so that you go limp. Best to do this when you're already sitting or lying, though you can passively resist from standing if you're willing to take a fall! By totally relaxing you make it much more difficult for the police to get a good grip of you and to carry you. Instead of being walked away by one officer, you will now have to be carried which will take several officers. Depending on how many police are at the action this will slow down the removal of you and your group considerably and they may even give up when they get tired, or if its too far to the police van. Relaxed muscles also hurt less when they get banged and bumped.

Be aware of the difference between passively and actively resisting arrest. If you flail your arms and try to wriggle away or try to release their grip on you, you may face a charge of 'obstructing a police officer in the execution of their duty'. Remember, it's always your choice, so if it gets

uncomfortable when they start to carry or drag you, you can get up and walk at any time. Wear old shoes and clothing that won't ride up when you are being carried. A rucksack can help protect your back. Some people advise that you break the rule about total relaxation, and keep your chin tucked tightly forward to stop your head dangling and possibly being damaged.

A word on communication

It's easy to get carried away and start shouting at police to let your compadres go, especially when friends are under pressure and possibly in pain. Remember that you need to be able to communicate with each other. Maybe the person being pulled out of your line or circle doesn't want you to hang on to their leg and play tug of war with the police, using them as the rope. You need to be able to hear them and respond if they ask for support, or ask you to let go. Keep communication calm and clear and talk through likely scenarios and personal limits in advance, if possible.

The tools of the trade

Borrowing heavily from 'Road Raging': www.eco-action.org/rr/ch12.html

Banners

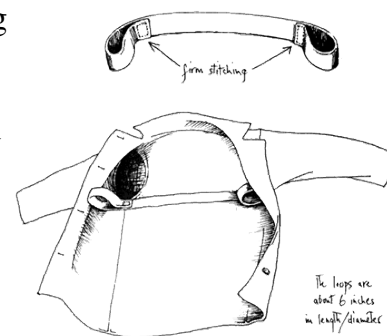
The most basic blockading prop is a banner – there's usually one around somewhere. Wrap your circle up tight in your banner to make it harder for police and security to break you apart. If the banners made of a tough material so much the better. If you've thought in advance to stitch in a few loops of nylon webbing (old seatbelt or rucksack straps) through which you can stick hands and feet all well and good.....

Seatbelt lock-ons

These are effective, low tech and cheap. They work by you wrapping your arms around something e.g. a tree or a vehicle axle, and then putting your wrists through loops sewn into your coat lining, under your armpits - right wrist to left armpit and vice versa. Alternatively you can work with others and form lines or circles by placing your arms round each other and through each others loops. Coat loop lock-ons are inconspicuous and mean you are always ready for action! Sew about a metre of strong, tough material - old seat belts (available from scrapyards) or climbing tape - into your coat

horizontally across the shoulder blades up to the armholes. Then double back the excess and sew the ends very firmly into place to form loops. The bigger the loops, the easier they are to find in a panicky situation. The smaller they are, the harder it is for them to pull your hands out (although you can twist the loops round and round so they tighten around your wrists). Practice with them, especially if planning to work with others.

The tape goes around your shoulder blades directing the pressure around your back rather than on the coat. The loops are very difficult to get to, being under your garments and under your armpits. They may rip or cut your coat to get to them, so use an old coat. You can design them to be worn



as a 'waistcoat' without stitching them into a coat. If you're having to go through airport style security, and can't get any metal items in, seatbelt lock-ons are a lot better than nothing!

Handcuffs are good for carrying in your pocket unobtrusively and for locking on underneath machinery, to gates etc, but are easy to cut off - most handcuffs are pretty flimsy. Loops of strong cord or tape can often be just as effective and are cheaper. Decent handcuffs are difficult to find. Army surplus or "sex shops" sometimes sell weak ones. Most handcuffs can be undone with a standard key type, which security, police and bailiffs often carry. They also have a 'self release' catch that you need to saw or snap off before you use them.

Padlocks and chains can be put on gates cause confusion and may hold up work, while they run around looking for the keys and then bolt croppers. Superglue or liquid metal in their padlocks means that they have to cut off their own locks and keep buying new ones.

Bicycle D-locks are a classic direct action tool. They fit neatly around pieces of machinery, gates and your neck. It is worth working in pairs when trying to lock on. The person locking on carries the U shaped section, and loops it around both a suitable fixed piece of machine/gate and their neck. Then their "buddy", carrying lock barrel and key, secures the lock, and hides, or runs off with the key. If locking on to a machine, someone must let the driver know that operating it will break someone's neck. If locking on, you may be there for some time, so choose your point carefully. They may remove any blankets or seats you have, and isolate you from other protesters, sometimes forming a screen around you.

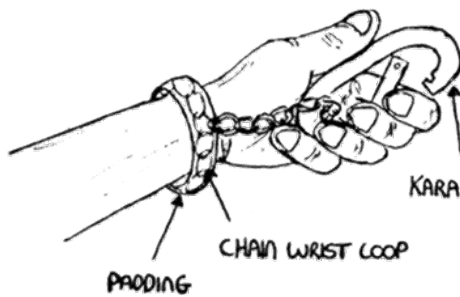
You may want to keep a spare key about your person but they may search you for it. Any search should be conducted by a same sex officer. If the buddy stays (with key) within earshot, then you can be released in an emergency. It is important that anything you lock onto cannot be removed or unscrewed (like a vehicle foot plate or bumper). Gates can sometimes be removed from their hinges, so consider securing the hinge side as well as the opening side. If there isn't an immovable object then D-lock yourselves together around the neck in pairs or groups and sit in the road.

If the police are not expecting you they won't have the appropriate cutting equipment available immediately and so you might be able to stay there for an hour or so until they come with boltcroppers. Most contractors have their own hydraulic boltcroppers, which cut the strongest lock in seconds. The lock gives a frightening jolt when cut, so don't lock on if you have a neck injury. Locks are most effective on targets remote from croppers.

If you are locking on under a vehicle you will need several support people to communicate directly with the driver to tell them you are under the lorry and that they will kill or injure you if they try to move it. They should try to get the driver to switch the engine off. Until it's absolutely clear the vehicle's not going anywhere, it's probably best to have one or two people standing in front of the lorry to stop it moving, carrying a big 'Stop!' sign. Parking a vehicle in front of the lorry is even more effective as the lorry driver is unlikely to try to drive off into a vehicle, but they have been known to drive through a line of protestors. For more on safety see Delia's Guide

Arm tubes

Arm tubes are best made from thick metal pipe such as old cast iron drainpipes or lamppost shafts (ask at your local scrapyard), but can also be made from plastic pipe or even cardboard. Your tube needs to be the diameter of a clothed arm and three to four feet long. Ideally the tube should have a strong metal pin welded across the middle. It can slow down the process of cutting you out of a tube if you hide the welds with paint. You also need to make a loop of strong cord, chain or



climbing tape which fits around your wrist and attaches to a climbing carabiner or spring clip (cheaper and available from most hardware stores). When you put your arm in the tube, clip the carabiner over the centre pin. If you're using a tube without a pin, you'll need to clip on to your partner's carabiner. Remember that if you lock-on with handcuffs, you won't be able to release yourself. Check before the action how many layers of clothing you need to wear to get a snug but not too tight fit in the armtube.

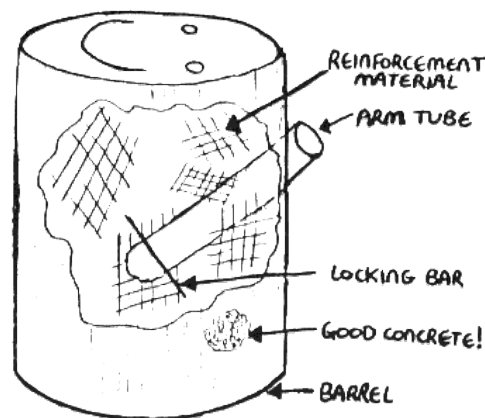
Arm tubes can be used in lots of ways: as a chain across a road or entrance; as a big circle in the road or around machinery; two people can use arm tubes to lock themselves around part of a vehicle chassis or around the wheel of a lorry; or one person can use a shorter tube or a 'V' shaped tube to wrap themselves around a digger arm, vehicle prop-shaft or a post. Depending on the configuration of the entrance/road you want to block, you might also want to consider using 'Y' shaped tubes for securing a chain of arm tubes to immovable objects, like lamp posts, at either side of the road.

The police or bailiffs will try to remove you if they can without actually cutting through the arm tubes. They sometimes try to push a hooked blade on a pole down the tube, to cut any cord or tape attaching you to the tube. Having a tight fit with your clothing or padding the arm-tube with foam, fabric etc, can hinder this, as can using chain instead of fabric to attach your clip to your wrist. They also sometimes use fibre-optic cameras to try to see what your arm is attached with, but it's easy to obscure the probe with your hand. They may use threats and intimidation or inflict pain using pressure points or twisting your arm until you unlock yourself or they may use the 'lets wait until one of them needs a pee' strategy. The answer to that of course is not to drink too much before hand and to wear incontinence pants!

If they can't persuade you to get out of the lock-on then they will probably use an angle grinder to cut the tube near the pin until there is a hole large enough to get in to cut the tape or chain or to unclip the carabiner. Once one tube is cut then the whole line or circle is broken.

It can get cold sitting or lying on the ground so dress for the weather and stuff bin liners and pieces of roll mat down the back of your trousers. Take lots of snacks and drinks but remember to have some support people who can feed you if you have both arms in tubes! Be aware that your support people may be moved away or even arrested. Lock-on at the last practicable moment as it can be uncomfortable, and go to the loo first!

Concrete lock-ons or 'dragons' can be built in houses, up trees, at the base of trees, in oil barrels, washing machines, roads, in cars and in tunnels. They are constructed from an arm tube, with a metal crossbar at the bottom, which is then set in concrete. The concrete mix is: 1 part cement to 3 parts sandy aggregate, it can be strengthened using washing up liquid. Pieces of chopped-up tyres and metal mesh, knuts and bolt, bits of scrap metal can be added to the concrete mix to hinder drilling out the concrete. The concrete needs time to set to its full strength so make them well in advance. When building, plan it so that the person will be in a comfortable position as they could be there for some time. To lock-on, put your arm down the arm-tube and clip your arm to the cross bar (see *Arm tubes*).



If they can't get your arm out, they will probably use a combination of power tools angle to cut through any outer barrel or other metal coating and get through the concrete. They will then need to cut through the arm tube, again using an angle-grinder. This will take quite a while, and will be noisy, dusty and scary. Have goggles, ear plugs and a dust mask with you.

Other lock ons have been built by welding metal arm tubes together in **X** or **H** formations to accommodate 4-6 people and slows down the cutting team considerably because it makes the lock-on too heavy to move and they will need to cut through more than one armtube before they can pick you up and move you all from the road. You could weld a very heavy object to your lock-on to make it even harder to move - cattle-grids, steel plates, lorry wheels and dead cars have all been used, making it difficult to cut through the tubes and difficult to simply lift you out of the way.

All the advice about support, confort and safety from the *Arm tube* section applies to lock-ons

Disposable cars

You can buy scrap cars very cheaply, but you will get arrested if you're stopped while driving an unroadworthy, uninsured, untaxed car. You can use cars to blockade gates, roads, motorways - just about anything. You can immobilise the car by slashing the tyres, removing wheels, or turning it over. You could also try building concrete lock-ons into the car, welding armtubes to the chassis or simply using D-locks to lock on to your own vehicle!

Support Systems

Support roles are always valuable on an action, but when you're locked on they come into their own:

Safety and comfort

You need people to ensure vehicles aren't moved when you're locked on and help mediate if you're facing aggression, as well as people to keep you fed, watered and to light your fags when

you've got both arms in arm tubes. It might be worth having someone to liaise with the police to ensure they fully understand the safety implications of your action.

Communication and decision making

If you're locked on under a vehicle, or in an inward facing circle you won't know for sure what's going on around you. You might be blocking the rear gate of a compound and have no idea whether the activists at the front gate are still in place. Having someone to roam from lock-on to lock-on, person to person, and keep everyone up to date with what's happening is vital. They can also facilitate decision making for the group as a whole.

Other roles

If you plan to use the media, you may need to ask someone to be the face and voice of your action. The police are unlikely to let cameras get too close to locked on activists, so you may never get the chance to say your well prepared piece.

You may also want observers to help reduce the risk of aggression and to record any arrests and ensure arrested activists get support at the police station.

Remember support people 'on the ground' are **not** immune from arrest. It's quite likely that at some stage they'll all be asked (or more likely, told) to move away from the site of the action. Since they can't offer effective support from the back of a police transit van, they may need to negotiate – another role for the 'police liaison' person?

Resources for more info on lock-ons and blockades

★ Delia Smith's Basic Blockading: www.geneticsaction.org.uk/delia.pdf

★ Road Raging: www.eco-action.org/rr/ch12.html

★ UHC Collective NVDA toolbox

<http://www.uhc-collective.org.uk/knowledge/toolbox/attack/index.htm>

<http://www.uhc-collective.org.uk/knowledge/toolbox/attack/tripods/tripod1.htm>



For more briefings on grassroots activism, and to find out about training workshops look at our website:

www.seedsforchange.org.uk

Or contact us:

Seeds for Change Lancaster

96 Church Street, Lancaster, LA1 1TD
lancaster@seedsforchange.org.uk
0845 330 7583

Seeds for Change Oxford

16b Cherwell Street, Oxford, OX4 1BG
oxford@seedsforchange.org.uk
0845 458 4776

A non profit network of social change trainers

This briefing is © copyright - copy & distribute freely!