

Staying Safe & Sensible in Action

A demonstration where police might attack requires a higher level of tactical awareness than your run-of-the-mill march. Here are some generally applicable suggestions to help you stay safe and effective in the streets.

Be aware of what is going on, what you want to happen, and how crowd and police dynamics are evolving, or could rapidly change.

Always have a safe space in mind. All demonstrators need to be aware of a safe place to get to if a situation grows out of hand. You define "safe" and "unsafe" for yourself. It could be behind some trees, in a park, a parking lot, a door-way, alleyway, a restaurant, several blocks from the action, etc. For some, safe is among the locked arms of fellow activists, right on the front lines. Safe spaces change depending on movement and barriers by other demonstrators and the police, etc. There's no hard and fast rule about finding a safe space, but always have one in mind before the shit hits the fan.

Similarly, you should always have an exit in mind. Assess how to leave a bad situation. Maybe it is best to be in a large group for protection. But if the police are herding you like cattle, then the large crowd is their focus and you may need to break up and leave in small groups. You should always be ready to quickly change clothing to avoid being recognized in case of pursuit. Getting away one moment might be your only chance to be active the next. Arrange with your buddies how to leave, and how to re-connect if you get separated during an exit.

Use the buddy system and move in a group. If at all possible, make sure to have a partner you can trust, to whom you will always stay close. That way, at least one person always knows your whereabouts and condition. Working in small groups of people, all of whom you know well and trust with your own safety, is another important factor. Even if you are not part of an organized affinity group with a plan of action, it is helpful to at least be with folks you can rely on. Arrange with your buddies how to re-connect if you get separated in a large demo. An easy technique is to agree to go back to the same spot you last saw each other.

Be aware of crowd dynamics and dangers. You need to know what is going on - not just in view, but around the corners and a few blocks away. Pay attention to the mood of the crowd and the police. Certain actions like property destruction and violence will likely be caused by or result in violent behavior on the part of police. Be aware of police movement and different groups of protestors entering or leaving an area. Try to monitor the vibes and focuses of friends and foes at all times.

Know what is going on out of view, by regularly sending out scouts to investigate what the police and other demonstrators are up to. Since the situation at a dynamic protest will change frequently and rapidly, scouts need to check around and report back often. It's a good idea to appoint a pair of group members as scouts.

Don't act on rumours. It's common at demonstrations for someone to approach a group of activists shouting, "The riot cops are coming!" As often as not, of course, there are no police coming at all. These people may be panicking, or may be agents trying to disrupt you. Acting on bad information can be dangerous. All critical information must be verified. If the person conveying info can't claim to have witnessed something directly, or if he or she is a stranger, then that information is unreliable.

Assume the riot cops will come. It shouldn't be surprising when the "authorities" do decide to blockade, surround, penetrate or break up a demonstration. This happens frequently, and

the key to not being caught off guard is to stay prepared.

Don't panic; help others stay calm. Sometimes at actions, the situation grows just plain frightening. But panic reduces critical judgment, adapting and coping abilities, and it can spread rapidly. Our best defence in a crisis is our collective cool - keeping each other centered & focused. If you can't stay focused and centered, then you need to quit the demo to chill. Similarly, if someone else can't be calmed down, they need to leave.

Be prepared to be photographed. If you don't want to be photographed by the police or media at an action, the only sure antidote is to not attend. There is simply no guarantee that you will not be later identified, almost no matter how you attempt to disguise yourself. Assume some photographers are working for the police.

Know your options, and what you and your comrades intend to do, in case of arrest or injury. This document cannot cover the various paths you may choose in case you or someone in your group is detained or arrested during an action. In order to be aware of how to prepare for and respond to such situations, you should seek training and advice from the team providing legal & medical services to activists at a particular demo. The legal information changes from city to city.

Some protester / police scenarios to consider:

Traps

- 1) Your affinity group is non-violently blockading. The police are behind you. Some people come up and throw objects over you at the police. What do you do? What do you think the other actors (object-throwers & police) will do?
- 2) You are in a moving group. You go between two lines of police. (The police can then close behind you, blocking your retreat).
- 3) You are in a group. You go down a street with no side exits through the buildings. There are police in front blocking your path. They can form behind you & you are now trapped.
- 4) You are in a moving group. You go besides a line of police. An undercover agent in your group points out someone, the police then jump in and capture that person(s). The undercover agent may even help in the capture.
- 5) You are in a moving group. You go up to a line of police. You possess a legal permit to march. The police block your path and tell you to immediately disperse, or face arrest. What do you do?
- 6) Your moving group is about to turn left at the corner. What information do you need? How will you get it?
- 7) You are part of a group that is in a space. The police arrive. As they start forming around you, what do you think they might do? What should you do?

Safety

- 1) Your group unfortunately is about to get arrested. How should you act?
- 2) The police are in front of your group that is occupying valuable territory. They are putting on gas masks. What do you think they might do? What should you do?

- 3) The police are hitting people with their batons, pepper spraying people, launching tear gas, spraying water, firing plastic bullets, launching manure, charging people with their horses, &/or arresting selective people. What should you do?
- 4) You or others have been hurt by the police. What should you/your affinity group do?
- 5) After being hurt, people want to take photographs. What do you do? Why do they want to take photographs?
- 6) The police are clearing out a protest. They are: on foot; motorcycle; in vehicles; & or on horses. How do you exit safely? What are the positive and negative dynamics of escaping crowds?
- 7) The police attack a crowd. Some people get pumped up by the action and start throwing debris at the police. What do you do? How is this situation going to unfold?
- 8) How do you evaluate what you think you can get away with at a protest with police presence?

Protest Dynamics

- 1) Your affinity group is conducting a certain type of action (rowdy, peaceful, dynamic, static, etc.) Another individual or group enters the space and acts in a way that negates the effects of your action. What do you do?
- 2) You go to an action with a plan. At the action, an opportunity unfolds, and some other protesters ask you to help them with an action that isn't in your affinity groups' plan. What do you do? What information do you need?
- 3) You go to an action without a firm plan, but a general sense of what you could do. At the action, an opportunity unfolds, and some other protesters ask you to help them with an action that has a higher level of risk. What do you do? What information do you need?
- 4) You support a diversity of tactics, but some people are using tactics in a very un-cool or incompetent way. It's a public demo and you don't own it. What do you do?
- 5) Your blockade needs more people involved. A labour march is passing several blocks away. The marshals are diverting the march away from the real action where you are. What can you do to increase union membership in your local blockade?
- 6) Two large groups with different agreed-upon action guidelines find themselves in the same area wanting to do their action. How do you proceed? What are your objectives? What are the positives and negatives towards splitting up, or compromising and staying together?
- 7) It's one day of action, and there are lots of police and lots variety of tactics. Some people are not able to assume the risk of certain tactics. They also may not be prepared to protect themselves from a violent police response. What attitudes and roles should the various affinity groups and protesters assume? What goals do you have?
- 8) Your groups support a variety of tactics, and also to respect the working class St. Jean Baptist neighbourhood. But some people want to trash private commercial property there. What should you do?

9) What would you do if in the above scenario, the would be trashers accuse you of being peace cops? or sell-outs?

10) The situation is intense and people in your milieu are starting to panic. What steps should you take?

11) How should you respond to people shouting about imminent police arrival?

12) The situation is dynamic. A charismatic person makes recommendations for collective action that you think unwise, but seems to be well supported. What steps can you take?

13) The situation is dynamic and quick decisions must be made by representatives from the various affinity groups at a spokes council meeting in the middle of the street. How is your affinity group prepared to participate in the spokes council in an efficient and democratic way?