Protest Liaison

We optimise actions by liaising with the police and security contractors, as well as local authorities, on behalf of the protest.

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What do XR Protest Liaison do?



If a protest action is assessed by the planners as likely to be more effective if the police are notified in advance, XR PL will contact the relevant force and let them know the details of the protest. At the protest itself, XR PLs will be wearing a burgundy coloured tabard and will act as the point of contact between the police and the protesters. It is best that other rebels on the protest refer the police to XR PL, rather than tell the police anything themselves.

Contact protestliaison@extinctionrebellion.uk.

The Right to Protest vs. the Role of the Police

Whilst there is no specific ‘right to protest’ in law, everyone does have the right to peacefully protest. This right is enshrined in the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association, which are rights protected under Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR is enshrined in UK law in the Human Rights Act 1998.

In terms of the role of the police with regard to protests, one of the better explanations comes in the 2009 Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary report, Adapting to Protest, **‘ECHR Article 11 places both negative and positive obligations on the police. The police must not prevent or restrict peaceful protest except to the extent allowed by ECHR Article 11**. In addition, **the police have a duty in certain circumstances to safeguard the right to peaceful assembly**. In other words, public authorities, including the police, are required to show a certain degree of tolerance towards peaceful gatherings where demonstrators do not engage in acts of violence, even if these protests cause a level of obstruction or disruption. The level of tolerance that should be extended is likely to be the subject of extensive public and political debate, which has merit in its own right.’

Therefore, whilst public authorities should not normally interfere with the rights to protest, they are however qualified rights, and there are circumstances where the right to protest can be restricted if that restriction is assessed to be proportionate (e.g. if the restrictions are prescribed by law, pursue one or more legitimate aims, and are necessary in a democratic society). The government has enacted legislation over the years to prescribe in law restrictions to the right to protest, e.g. Public Order Act 1986, Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, and Public Order Act 2023. When the police choose to use such legislation, it is for the courts to determine whether or not their restriction to the right to protest is necessary and proportionate, or actually unlawful (as was the case with the Metropolitan Police and the October 2019 protest in London).

Further more detailed legal advice is available in the Arrestee and Legal Support section and via Informed Dissent Resources.

Communicating with the police

It is acknowledged and understood that the issue of talking to the police at all is a sensitive one, not least because of the findings in many reports (e.g. The Casey Review) that police forces are institutionally racist and misogynistic. It is recognised that people of colour, other communities racialised as non-white, and other marginalised groups have suffered, and continue to suffer, from over-policing, and that their interactions with the police are inherently more risky than for those racialised as white. Through experience, we have found that liaison with police prior to an outreach action has resulted in a reduced police presence and a more welcoming environment for outreach to marginalised groups.

In these contexts, we believe that some forms of protest benefit from communicating with the police and/or Local Authorities in advance, whereas in other cases the protest will be more effective if the authorities are not notified in advance but liaised with once the action is in place.

The purpose of XR Protest Liaison is to help optimise the effectiveness of a protest action and to prioritise the safety of all involved. To that end we have developed channels of communication with the police. This enables us to contact the right people at the appropriate time, depending on the nature of the protest. It is important that when we speak to police they understand that what we say is true to the best of our knowledge at the time. It is equally important that the police know and accept that we will withhold information in circumstances when disclosure would hinder the effectiveness of an action.

If your Action team or Local Group would like help and support in communicating with the local polioce or site security please contact us protestliaison@extinctionrebellion.uk.

Becoming an XR Protest Liaison - what does the role require?

The role of Protest Liaison is usually performed by an experienced rebel who has undergone the relevant training. The qualities needed are as follows:

- Embodies non-violence, calm, non-threatening
- Confident communicator with authority figures and rebels alike
- Assertive, never aggressive, natural de-escalator
- Respectful of all
- Understands main aspects of relevant law
- Recognises concerns, needs and vulnerabilities of marginalised, oppressed groups

Training is offered to interested rebels after a vetting process to maintain team security. If you feel this role is of interest to you, please contact protestliaison@extinctionrebellion.uk.