

# NVDA Training Handout

## Roles During Actions

Support roles are vital to the success of an action, and to the safety of the participants. These roles often aren't seen as being as "glamorous" as doing the direct action itself, but should be valued equally – without them, the action can't take place.

The roles listed here are common on actions, but shouldn't be regarded as a blueprint list for all actions. Different actions will need different roles, and it's important to think about what you'll need as a group (and how you're going to ensure it gets done) early on in the planning stage.

Sometimes people can take on more than one role, e.g. a legal observer might also be a first- aider, or police liaison, or even media contact. The key is to make sure that all necessary roles are covered, that everyone understands the extent of their commitment before you begin, and no one takes on tasks (support or otherwise) which they are unable to carry out.

### Transport:

self-explanatory, really. In most cases will need to avoid arrest, so they can drive people home as well.

### Legal Support/Police Station Support:

Stays somewhere safe and away from the action, next to a phone. They should have all pertinent information about each member of the group such as their name, and contacts for their parents, loved ones or employers, so that they can let people know where they are. Will take calls from the police station, co-ordinate post-arrest support etc. Post-arrest support will involve tracking down any arrestees, and picking people up from police stations. Should have transport to reach all the police stations in the area, and know how to get to them. Have snacks, cigarettes, water - whatever people will want when they are released.

### Legal Observer:

Stays on the fringes of the action, responsible for observing a particular group/ activity, and taking detailed notes of interactions with police including names, police badge numbers, license plate numbers, what takes place and exactly when. Should be ready to be called over by those taking part in the action if the police are being unreasonable or are making arrests. A camera or video recorder can be helpful. Being a legal observer is no guarantee of immunity from arrest

### Police Liaison:

Conveys information and demands between the police and the group. Should be articulate, calm and able to communicate diplomatically with the police. Tries to de-escalate the situation as much as possible. This person risks arrest as police will sometimes think that the person speaking for the group is the group's leader. They are NOT the group's decision maker, decisions can only be made by the group as a whole. It helps to communicate this clearly to the police early on.

### Action support:

Provides direct personal support for arrestable people - sometimes referred to as "Action elves"! This person may risk arrest, but tries to avoid it. Depending on the nature of the action this means bringing water, food supplies and keeping everyone high- spirited and informed. For actions involving lock- ons it is best to have at least one support for every two people risking arrest.

**Media Liaison / Spokesperson:** Helps facilitate the interactions between the group and the media. Prepares press releases and makes calls to get desired media on site at the time of the action. Should know issues and sound bites and be able to speak clearly and articulately to reporters and TV cameras. May wish to dress more conservatively to convey an impression of respectability if interviewed on camera. Media work is often split into two distinct roles – background media work (press releases etc.) and the Media Spokesperson on site.

### First Aider

The more people who know medical care of any kind the better, but in many types of action it is wise to have at least one person who knows basic first aid and CPR (resuscitation).

### Action Participants:

Quite simply the people carrying out the actual action (climbing, locking on, sitting down, trespassing, etc). Should be technically prepared for everything they plan to do, and hopefully well rested, fed and calm. Last on this list for good reason – only able to play at being 'direct action heroes' thanks to all the support team's hard work.

**This handout was produced by a loose collective of Oxford-based trainers. For training workshops on all aspects of non-violent direct action and co-operative group work, contact [matthew.h@mtcp.net](mailto:matthew.h@mtcp.net) or call 07796 430141**

# Support Systems on Actions

## Affinity Groups

[Borrowing heavily from: [www.starhawk.org/activism/affinitygroups.html](http://www.starhawk.org/activism/affinitygroups.html)]

An affinity group, at its most basic, is a group of people who have an affinity for each other- they know each others strengths and weaknesses, support each other, and do (or intend to do) political/campaign work together. They are a means to collective action, either on their own or as an autonomous group within larger protests.

The concept of 'affinity groups' has a long history. They developed as an organising structure within the Anarchist army during the Spanish Civil War and have been used with amazing success over the last thirty years of feminist, anti- nuclear, environmental and social justice movements around the world. In this context they were first used as a structure for a large scale nonviolent blockade during the 30,000 strong occupation of the Ruhr nuclear power station in Germany in 1969, and then in the United States occupations / blockades of the Seabrook nuclear power station in 1971 when 10,000 people were arrested. Their use in sustaining activists through high levels of police repression has been borne out time and again. More recently, they have been used constructively in the mass protest actions in Seattle, Washington, Genoa, and Prague.

An important aspect to being part of an affinity group is to get to know where each other is at regarding the campaign or issue. You should all have a shared idea of what you want, individually & collectively, from the action/campaign; how you envisage it happening; what support you will need from others; and what you can offer others. It helps if you have agreement on certain basic things: how active, how spiritual, how nonviolent, how touchy-feely, how 'spiky', how willing to risk arrest, the limits of your involvement, your overall political perspective etc. But then again, you may all just work together / study together etc.

## The Buddy System

"Buddying up" on actions means agreeing in small groups (generally 2-4) to look out for each other's well being. Buddying should mean you are never alone on the action – you are less likely to get lost, and have someone to leave the scene with you if you need to stop for any reasons. Buddying up is a good idea whether your joining a larger mass-action, or acting within an affinity group.

Buddies should be prepared to:

- Know if their buddy has any special (e.g. medical) needs
- Check that their buddy is still with them whenever a group is moving around
- Make sure their buddy is physically OK, and find food/drink/warm clothing/medical attention if they aren't
- Leave with their buddy if they want to stop, for any reason
- Keep an eye on their buddies emotional state, and try to calm them down / comfort them when necessary
- Tell legal support if their buddy gets arrested
- Call for observers/first aiders if their buddy is getting hurt

This might make it all seem rather formal and cumbersome . In reality it isn't – it's just a way of making sure no one gets forgotten in the confusion of an action, and everyone has a mate to look out for them.

## Further Resources on Direct Action

*\*General NVDA Guides / Activist resources*

[www.eco-action.org/rr/](http://www.eco-action.org/rr/) - Anti roads protest guide (but applicable to many other types of action)

[www.geneticsaction.org.uk/delia.pdf](http://www.geneticsaction.org.uk/delia.pdf) – Excellent guide to blockading techniques!

[www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/CDindex.html](http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/CDindex.html) - New York site with loads of resources

[www.starhawk.org/activism/activism.html](http://www.starhawk.org/activism/activism.html) – Source for some of the stuff on this sheet

<http://www.schnews.org.uk/diyguide/guidetopublicordersituations.htm>- guide to dealing with the police in public order situations, staying safe & effective

[www.peaceneeds.info/tools/index.php](http://www.peaceneeds.info/tools/index.php) – includes dealing with fences & organising mass actions

*\*Info on affinity groups*

[www.starhawk.org/activism/affinitygroups.html](http://www.starhawk.org/activism/affinitygroups.html)

[www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/Affinity.html](http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/Affinity.html)

*\*Info on legal rights*

[www.activistslegalproject.org.uk](http://www.activistslegalproject.org.uk) – Series of detailed activist legal briefings

[www.yourrights.org.uk/](http://www.yourrights.org.uk/) - Liberty's guide to your rights

*\*Info on consensus decision making*

[www.vernalproject.org/Papers/ASmithResponse-33W.pdf](http://www.vernalproject.org/Papers/ASmithResponse-33W.pdf)

[www.starhawk.org/activism/trainer-resources/consensus.html](http://www.starhawk.org/activism/trainer-resources/consensus.html)

[www.seedsforchange.org.uk/res/consens.html](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/res/consens.html)

*\*Info on using the media*

[www.mediatruster.org/-](http://www.mediatruster.org/) various online guides

[www.fraw.org.uk/gs/handbook/media.htm](http://www.fraw.org.uk/gs/handbook/media.htm) – George Monbiot's Guide to exploiting the media

# Personal Safety on Actions – Body Protection & Fashion Tips!

There are a number of obvious and simple things you can do to ensure that any piece of direct action is safer for you. Most of these are just common sense:

## Wear Appropriate clothing

As we said, common sense. For example, if you're taking part in a die-in, and planning on passively resisting attempts to move you, you're likely to get dragged around a little by police or security. If the clothing you're wearing is too thin, or rides up your back so your skin comes into contact with tarmac...well, you see where we're going! Think about clothes that will protect you and be practical for the action. Secure pockets for essentials are really useful. Remember that cords from hooded tops, and belts will be taken off you if you're arrested, so if your trousers fall down without the belt... ..think again!

**Wearing several layers** allows you to accommodate the vagaries of the weather. Take more clothes than you need. You can take them off if you're too hot, but if you don't have them and get too cold, there's nothing you can do. They also make excellent padding in your rucksack, and help protect your neck, spine and kidneys against potential injury!

**Remove jewellery** – remove anything that might injure you or your fellow protestors in an action scenario before you go out to play.

**Tying up hair & cutting nails** – again just common sense to help avoid you getting hurt or accidentally hurting others. Hair

can easily get tangled up and offers a nice handhold for police or security!

**Emergency Supplies** – carry enough water and snacks to last you the duration of your action and stay in police custody. Don't carry water in glass bottles in case the bottle breaks and injures you, or is interpreted as a weapon by over-eager police officers! You might also want to think about tampons, any medication you need, reading matter, bust cards (telling you your rights on arrest and a solicitors number), change for phone, bus or taxi fare, etc.

**What NOT to take** – knives (unless absolutely vital for the action), illegal drugs, incriminating names & addresses (think about your mobile phone address book), briefing sheets, maps etc. If you're arrested the police will search you and can use anything they find as evidence against you or other activists.

**Police Horses** – we're often asked what to do when faced with police horses. Common activist 'lore' says that sitting down is the safest option because they're trained not to trample sitting or lying bodies. We have to admit that we've never tested the theory. If you're unfortunate enough to ever be in a position to test the theory, please let us know what happens!

## Effective, Safe Actions

There are other techniques you can use to make your actions safe & effective:

**Training** – as a collective of trainers we'd naturally recommend training/skillshare workshops as a safe space to learn skills and roleplay scenarios, so that when you encounter the real thing, you've already got an idea of what it might feel like and how you might choose to react.

**Affinity Groups** – we also strongly recommend that you work in the affinity group model. By definition affinity groups offer their members support – both emotional and physical and can put in place support systems, such as legal support (see elsewhere in this handout for a list of affinity group roles). A together affinity group can still carry out an effective autonomous action in the midst of a larger action that has lost the plot. Your affinity group also ensures you at least a few people who approve of your action! At the very least we suggest that you 'Buddy Up' (see elsewhere in this handout)

**Talking to friends, family & employers in advance** can reduce the chances of feeling isolated and alone because you choose to take action. We hear lots of stories of

people worried about their job or studies who have approached tutors and employers only to find them supportive and sympathetic. It's sensible to check the terms of your employment

**Using the media** can be an effective way to ensure that your message gets heard, and your action communicates effectively. This can't be guaranteed – not all journalists are sympathetic, so if using the mainstream media, do some research. Having journalists/photographers on site makes violence from police, security or the public less likely

**Action Groundrules** – if you're organising an action, groundrules can ensure that it fulfils your vision for an effective action. If you're participating, groundrules, or the lack of them can help you choose which actions you feel comfortable taking part in.

**Legal Rights** – if unsure, consult a solicitor, approach experienced activists/trainers for info, or see one of the web based legal resources (see below for the Activists' Legal Project contact details).

# Quick Decision Making Using Consensus

Consensus Decision Making is a system of reaching decisions that is widely regarded as one of the most participative and empowering processes available to activist groups. There are methods of using consensus, quickly, in an action situation. However, since consensus needs everyone to agree to abide by the process, and to be familiar with it, you need to be honest with yourselves. Sometimes it might be better to bite the bullet and appoint someone to take decisions in a tight corner (you can of course agree this in advance, consensually!). But if you decide you want to try out 'Quick Consensus', here's how it works....

So, you're taking part in a march in protest against arms exports, or war. The police have given you 2 minutes to get out of the road, or they'll move in and arrest you all. How do you decide what to do?

## Quick Consensus Process

- Firstly appoint a facilitator – it would be wise to do this in advance – saves wasting precious time now. The facilitator is there to make the process work – not to make all the proposals or dominate the group!
- The facilitator *briefly* restates and clarifies the situation to make sure everyone is clear - **“We've been given 2 minutes to move or we will all be arrested”**
- The facilitator asks for proposals: **“Any proposals?”**. In some cases there may be time for discussion, but in others there won't be. It's up to the facilitator to act appropriately....
- **“Yeah, I propose we link arms and sit down”**. Again, in some cases you might have time to make friendly amendments to the proposal.
- Facilitator restates the proposal, for clarity, and then tests for consensus:
  - **“Any blocks?”** – no
  - **“Any Stand asides?”** – **“yeah, I'll lose my job if I'm arrested – I'll watch from the side and act as a legal observer”**
  - **“Everyone else agree?”** – chorus of agreement or silent applause (handsignal)
- Group implements decision

## Blocks in Quick Consensus

As with the normal consensus process, a block kills a proposal, dead. If the proposal is blocked, you need a new one (quick!). In normal consensus a block would only be used to object on the grounds that a proposal would split the group. Some groups insist that in quick consensus before you can block you must have a counter proposal. In this version a block can be a way of moving the discussion on. In other words you could block a proposal simply because the group is failing to make a decision, not just for the 'moral' reasons normally associated with a block. As long as your group is clear on the way the block is used, this isn't a problem.

## Quick Consensus Flowchart

At its most basic (and therefore quickest) it looks like this:

