

a tiny little blockades booklet

“Don't be a marshmallow. Walk the street with us into history. Get off the sidewalk. Stop being vegetables. Work for Justice.”

-- Dolores Huerta, Co-Founder of the United Farm Workers

Here's a little bitty booklet on blockades. Consider it a reference guide for the training you just went through. If something is repeated more than once, it is because we think it is really important. If something is missing, that *does not mean we think it is not important*. This is in no way comprehensive, but we hope it helps.



IMPORTANT BASICS:

- **Be strategic.** Make sure your tactics are informed by the vision, goals and strategy. Don't think in terms of "soft" vs. "hard" or "more radical." Instead, think in terms of what is appropriate for the goals, strategy, tone, message risk, level of escalation, etc.
- **Start simple.** Build up. Don't deploy all your technology at once. Leave room to escalate, if that is appropriate.
- **Build a crew.** It all begins with a good action team (affinity group) and good non-violence/direct action training.
- **All roles are important.** A good support team is essential.
- **Know your limits.** Make a realistic assessment of your capacity and resources.
- **Scout. Scout. Scout.** Spend a lot of time getting to know your location.
- **Know your choke points-** the spots that make you the most secure and pesky blockader. Choose a spot that they cannot just work/walk/drive around your.
- **Practice.** Over and over. Then practice some more.
- **Get help.** Take advantage of the experience of others, through training, or on-site support. Everyone does it for the first time once. And the more

experience you have, the more responsibility you have to support others in an appropriate way.

- **Don't plan "for" your action; plan "through" your action.** Think of the action as "the middle"- there is a ton of prep work and a ton of follow-through, legal, emotional, political...
- **Make a Plan B....and C, D &E, if you think you might need it.**
- **Plan a media strategy** and execute. Make sure your message gets out and that your action logic is as transparent as possible. Don't let communications be an afterthought.
- **Eliminate unnecessary risk.** Make your action as safe as it can be to achieve your goals.
- **Do not ignore power dynamics** within your group or between you and the police/oppressor/state. Race, class, gender identity (real or perceived), sexual identity (real or perceived), age, physical ability, appearance, immigration status, nationality, and much more; all impact your relationship to the action.
- **Dress for success.** Make sure that your appearance helps carry the tone you want to set for your action. Dress comfortably. If you are going to be "locked-down" for an extended period of time, unable to move, consider wearing adult diapers. Have your support people around with layers, if it gets cold.
- **Stay hydrated.** Make sure your support people can get water to you, if you can not use your hands.
- **Be Creative. Have Fun.**

SOME BASIC BLOCKADING TOOLS

Human Blockades without any gear:

- You can deploy anywhere.
- Doesn't take a lot of resources.
- Greater option for different levels of participation/non-cooperation. (some can go limp, others walk).
- When someone is removed, it is possible to easily re-continue the blockade.
- Visually understood as "non-violent civil disobedience" (i.e. builds on existing cultural knowledge from Civil Rights and anti-Viet Nam War actions, for example)
- Easy to "spring" on the target.
- You can do it almost anywhere.
- Doesn't have great "staying power." (i.e. easy to arrest folks).



- Doesn't require violence from the police to break-up (but often gets it anyway).

Applications: Human blockades are great for blocking roads, entrances, construction/destruction equipment, pretty much anything. Just link arms and sit down- or link arms and legs, intertwine arms and legs, make a human chain by wrapping arms around each other's waists. Long chains, circles, or any shape you want. If you sit on your hands, they are less visible, which requires a bit more force by the cops. Unless you have an incredibly large number of people, very good media and/or are mixed in with folks using gear, you can expect to be removed fairly quickly, if the police decide to do so.

U-locks: *U-shaped bicycle or motorcycle locks.*

- Relatively cheap (depending on size and quality)
- Easy to use
- Easy to conceal
- Can be combined with other tools (like a barrel)
- Visually demonstrates determination- clearly.
- Hard to remove without inflicting injury.

Applications: doors, wheel axles, signs, heavy equipment, office furniture, gates, fences, bridges, rail tracks, friends (to form a human chain), and many other places. Let your imagination go!

Most common application is to put the lock around your neck and lock it to an object. Make sure the object can't just be "lifted" out of the lock (choose a sign pole, not a chair leg). If one lock isn't big enough to get around your neck and the object, you can string 2 locks together. It is helpful to have the bar of the lock facing out, so you can put a message on it. Make sure that the area surrounding the object you are locked to is free of unnecessary dangers (i.e. make sure there are no electrical cables, make sure car drivers can easily see you, etc.). Make sure that you can stay in the "lock-down" position for an extended period of time (i.e. make sure you don't have to stand with your knees bent 45 degrees for 6 hours).

There is always a need to have a shared plan in your action group about what to do with the keys. It is good to have one close by for emergencies and give the other to a support person. If you choose to keep the key on your person, expect them to be found with a search. Whatever you decide, keep it consistent within the group. This is true for cables as well.

Motorcycle cables: A “Cobra Link” is a hardened steel cable encased by overlapping hardened steel plates. “Kryptonite” cables are not as strong as



Cobra

Link, but less expensive and usually strong enough to keep the cops at bay for a while. You can also use chains and padlocks, which are less point.

strong, but can make the

- Much stronger than
- Greater reach than places.
- Can be combined with U-locks.
- Can be used around the waist, not just neck.
- Can be more comfortable than U-locks and lock-boxes.
- Hard to remove, but risk of injury can be much less than U-lock.

U-locks.

a U-lock- can get hard to reach

See U-lock section for info on keys, safety and comfort.

Lock-Boxes: Steel pipes designed for you to put your arm through and lock your hand around a metal pin at a center point- or to another person’s hand. The pin is what the lock-down person clips their wrists to with a chain “bracelet” and carabiner. Lock-boxes can be made out of metal pipe or large diameter PCN with chicken-wire, and duct-tape or tar.



- You can make them yourself, and it isn’t too expensive if you salvage the materials.
- Good for linking people to each other to occupy a space.
- Can be combined with other objects, such as cars and barrels.
- Can be combined with a non-gear human blockade.
- Doesn’t require keys- the blockader can choose to release at anytime.
- Can get very tiring.
- Many urban cops and fire departments now have the tools to quickly remove people from lock-boxes. (we need to develop better boxes)
- Can be conspicuous to deploy.
- Can be “planted” in the ground or sunk in concrete to block roads.

- A good surface for a message.

Lock-boxes are great for locking to gates, fences, equipment, axles, other people, and around large items (with enough people). They can be useful to extend the life of a sit-in or occupation, or for blocking streets. Depending on what you are locking to, you can use a straight or angled box.

How to make a lock-box

- Get 24-26" length of metal pipe (or as long as it needs to be for arms length). The pipe should be ¼" thick (preferably) and the diameter should be about 4". The most important thing is that the diameter of the pipe is big enough to comfortably have your arm in and make a fist, but not so wide that the cops can stick their hands in and un-clip you. The lock-box should fit the activist, not vice-versa.
- You can go to a metal shop and have these cut down- or have a welder friend do it for free. Try to salvage the pipe from a scrap-yard.
- You can use PVC pipe instead of metal. PVC is lighter, but weaker.
- Drill a hole in the center of the pipe- angle it just a bit, this makes more room for your hand and also separates the weak points.
- Run a metal pin through the hole, it should be just a bit longer than the diameter of the whole (to account for the angling of the holes). Rebar or a bolt work well. Cut the ends so they are just past flush with the ends and spot-weld the pin in place. If using PVC, you can use pipe cement, or even use a nut/bolt system and weld the nuts onto the bolt ends after insertion. This leaves a bump, that you then have to cover with the chicken wire.
- File down so that it is close to smooth.
- Smooth out the ends of the tube so your arms are comfortable.
- Cover the pipe with chicken wire and duct-tape or chicken wire, tar and duct-tape.

The jewelry: The chain bracelet and carabiner is how you attach yourself to the pin.

- 12-15" length of 1/8" steel chain
- a small nut and bolt or some other fastener to close the chain around your wrist.
- A small, non-locking carabiner (such as the kind used for a key chain) or any spring clip. Make sure it is not too big for the pipe and doesn't make



your hand uncomfortable to maneuver inside the pipe, AND that it is big enough to go around the pin. It also has to fit through the chain bracelet.

- Wrap some comfortable material around your wrist, like a tube sock without the foot cut off, add your bracelet (see below), roll the sock over it, and duct tape around it.
- Wrap the chain around your wrist and line up two links where the chain is snug around your wrist, but with enough room to manipulate the carabiner. Use the bolt or connector to attach the two end of the chain.
- Attach the mini-carabiner to the chain and align it to your hand, so you can manipulate the carabiner.
- Make sure that your arm cannot just be pulled loose from the chain (too loose); and make sure that the chain is not so tight that you can't actually manipulate the carabiner to clip (and unclip) to the lock-box.
- If two different people are using a single lock-box, you can choose to forego the pin, and have the two carabiners clip to each other; however when the cops pull, it will pull the other person, and that can be painful.
- Do not use handcuffs or zip-ties for jewelry. They can be painful. They can get tighter and tighter despite your best efforts. You cannot unlock them easily to release yourself if you need to. In the end, you will probably spend plenty of time in handcuffs, anyway.

Angled Lock-box (45-90 degrees): Angled lock boxes are much more comfortable if you are using both arms to reach around an object, or if you are trying to make a circle with a group of folks. You can also reach into harder to reach places (like axels of vehicles).

- Cut the pipe at the angle you want and rejoin by welding or pipe-cement, and reinforce with tar or duct tape.
- You do not require a pin if you are linking to your own arms or to another person, since you can clip directly to their jewelry; but when the cops pull it will pull the other person a lot more.
- If attaching a pin, pick one of the two ends of cut pipe and attach the pin before rejoining the ends. Keep it close enough to the joint that the second person can easily clip to it.

Lock-boxes can be sunk into almost anything, using a bit of concrete or by other methods (cars, barrels, furniture, trash cans, the ground, etc.)



Nevada nuclear weapons test site highway blockade.

Be creative. Once you've worked with lock-boxes a bit, you can try to develop new ways of using them and creative ways of strengthening them. Remember to paint a message on your lock-box, it is the most likely to be in the center of a photograph of your action.

"There is nothing wrong with a traffic law which says you have to stop for a red light. But when a fire is raging, the fire truck goes right through that red light ... Massive civil disobedience is a strategy for social change which is at least as forceful as an ambulance with its siren on full."

-- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

RISK, SAFETY, POWER and other random thoughts for your consideration.

- Non-violent Direct Action and Civil Disobedience always involve some level of risk- of arrest, injury, violence... Some aspects of risk are within your control, and some are not. How the cops will react to a particular scenario or situation is never 100% predictable. By thinking through your action, and the context in which it will take place, you can develop some scenarios to help you predict how things will go.
- Not everyone is taking the same risks. Race, class, gender identity (real and perceived), age, appearance, immigration status, physical ability, being perceived as a "leader," all change your relationship to the action; i.e. the risks of violence and arrest by the police and the potential legal and economic consequences of the action. Also remember that there are power dynamics within your action group. Pretending that they do not exist or ignoring them "for the good of the action," can compromise your ability to execute well, increasing risks. Better to be transparent and work through these things together than to find out the hard way that you don't quite trust each other.
- Some devices increase the risk of injury simply by design- u-locking your neck to a 55 gallon drum filled with concrete means that any attempt to



move the drum could snap your neck. This is by design. It increases the “staying power” of your action by creating a deep decision dilemma for the police/oppressor/opposition. All blockades gear can be dangerous. Understand the risks.

- It is only safe to lock (with or without gear) to equipment/vehicles when they are not running and when the operator has been made positively aware of your presence. If you are lying down in front of a truck and the driver is not aware that you are there- there is no decision dilemma, and no action logic. That is not direct action, it is an accident waiting to happen.
- If something looks unsafe in a way that you did not predict; or seems sketchy for any reason, it probably is. Always avoid unnecessary risk of injury. Getting hurt and getting arrested are not the point. The best actions are the ones where we get to stay as long as we want and the action ends on our terms- not in arrest or injury.
- Practice. Practice. Practice. The more you practice, the safer you will be and the more effective your action will be. Making mistakes can be serious.
- This little book is missing a ton of stuff. There are many forms of blockades (from physical barricades to “tripods” to banner-hangs and more) that are not covered. What is covered is only given limited space. It is designed to give you a little reference to go along with the training.

Have Fun

"Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that numbers of people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of the leaders of their government and have gone to war, and millions have been killed because of this obedience... Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty. Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running and robbing the country. That's our problem."

-- Howard Zinn