



Protest Preparedness

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Socialist Rifle Association (2025)**



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Introduction

This text is not meant to be a comprehensive "do's and don'ts" for expert organizers and protest goers to sharpen their skills. This is designed for people newer to protests to make sure that when you do come to an action that you are not going in without any preparation. Everyone has a first action, whether it is when you are 8 years old or 80, so do not feel ashamed for just learning these things. You are part of the struggle for a better world now, so let's make sure you are not contributing to the possibility of someone getting hurt or arrested. This knowledge is not shared to discourage people from joining the fight, but for the purposes of being prepared for conflict.



After the Action

Once finished, attempt a head count and account for any ongoing safety concerns. If you feel unsafe or when others are possible, don't walk back to your car alone. When driving home, don't take a direct route, and if you find yourself being followed head to a public place and let someone know. Remember: the action isn't done until everyone is home safe, check in with your comrades to ensure they made it back and do the same yourself.

If hit with tear gas or pepper spray, after rinsing all affected areas with water, put your clothes into a plastic bag then either toss them or repeatedly wash separately from other clothing. Make sure to thoroughly clean or replace any equipment or PPE that may have been contaminated.

When possible, rendezvous and debrief with other members of the action to destress and discuss what went well, any issues that arose, discuss jail support (see Jail Support section) for arrested members, and to help plan future actions.

Jail Support

If people at the action trust jail support, trust jail support! Good jail support will pick you up from jail, won't rest until everyone is released and home safe, and will follow your case and provide support until it is over. Here in MI we have the Michigan Solidarity Bail Fund and they are great about bailing people out ASAP, get to know your local support groups. The Michigan Solidarity Bail Fund can be reached at michigansolidaritybailfund@protonmail.com.

Don't put your name on anything or sign any petitions at an action except for filling out jail support forms. You're going to have to trust your intuition on this one. Watching what experienced trusted people do is helpful, but keep in mind that you might not see experienced people or organizers filling out jail support because they either did so pre-action, or they already have the jail support information memorized.

If you aren't comfortable filling out a jail support form, the jail support number will typically be provided and you can commit it to memory or write it on your body with a sharpie. However, cops know this tactic and if they see a phone number written on you they will do their best to wash it off. The advantage of filling out the form is that people on the outside can find you in the system once you've been booked even if you can't access the jail support number or are being denied a phone call.

Participate in jail support if you have the opportunity. You'd want people to be there for you, so be there for them. Solidarity for the cause includes solidarity to your fellow protestors.

Quick 101

Buddy System:

Bring a buddy if you can; if you are unable to bring a buddy let someone off site know where you are and follow-up with them after the action. Find a buddy at the action. Having someone or a group of people to watch your back is always safer than being alone. Organizing and participating in actions is a social activity, so practice getting to know new people.

Electronics Safety:

Do NOT bring your phone unless you absolutely need to. Get a burner with cash in another state if you feel like you're going to want one for emergencies or filming.

If you don't plan on filming the police, LEAVE YOUR PHONE OFF and in a faraday bag. Make sure that your phone is NOT unlockable by face ID, fingerprint, or other biometric methods. Codes only. They can't make you tell them the code but they can hold up your phone to your face or have you touch the fingerprint scanner. In an emergency situation where your phone was in use, restart your phone and do not log into it.

Don't Talk to Cops:

DO NOT TALK TO COPS under any circumstances. They aren't there to help. They can legally lie to you and ruin your life.

Don't Panic:

Stay alert, stick with the main protest body. Protests can become chaotic but there is safety in numbers. Maintain situational awareness.

Try and Get a General Understanding of What the Action is:

Ask people that might know. If it's a group that does things regularly, ask what the vibe of those events have been.

Listen to Leaders:

Read the crowd and pay attention to who people are following to gauge what is expected to happen. Situational awareness is a core way to stay safe as a group. If you feel like the leaders are leading the action in the direction of inadvertent arrest or harm, talk to the people around you and try to get that message to the folks that people are listening to so that everyone can stay on the same page and safe. Splitting off into a separate group "because you know better" could put yourself and/or others into danger of isolation and arrest.

"Pull the Cart":

If you want to help out, look for things that need doing and ask if you can be the person to help with it. If someone says "no" do not take it personally. Trust is earned and you will not always be given it readily.

Police Tactics Continued

-They are moving/marching in one of the formations in the Police Tactics section.

You see specialized equipment or vehicles such as:

- Cellular service tracking or blocking devices (Stingray/IMSI catchers)
- LRAD (Long Range Acoustic Device)
- APC/MRAP (Armored Personnel Carrier or Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle)
- Mobile surveillance trailer or mobile HQ
- Barricade rams

On "Resisting Arrest"

While the following section is geared towards those protesting in Michigan, the information provided is overall good practice and can be adapted to your specific region. Stay up to date on the laws and practices of your local cops.

Michigan's law makes resisting or obstructing arrest a potential felony with fines of up to \$2000 and up to two years in jail per count. You can get these charges for active or passive “resistance.”

“Passive” resistance includes running away, refusing to open your door for police, not putting your hands up when told, hiding from cops trying to arrest you, or anything else that can be construed as trying to “escape” an arrest situation.

“Active” resistance includes pushing, shoving, or kicking the person trying to make the arrest, but it can also mean shifting your body away from the officer arresting you because you are in pain, moving your neck or arms in fear, or responding involuntarily to the violence that police are committing against you.

“Obstructing” is defined as using or threatening to use physical force or knowingly failing to comply with a lawful demand. E.g., If an officer tells you to unlock from the excavator and you don't? Felony charge. The law is very broad and very easy to apply, so the charges often stick.

You can be charged with an individual R&O(Resisting and Obstruction) count for every cop present. Furthermore, you can catch R&O charges from more than just cops. Campus security, mall patrol, conservation officers, EMS techs, firefighters, SAR team members, and others can give commands that result in R&O charges.

Because most R&O falls under assault statutes, it can be considered a violent crime. That means a lot of people with R&O convictions can't hold certain jobs or licenses and can't cross the border, among other things.

This law has been applied to arrests at protests/direct actions, but we also want to point out that the overwhelming number of people getting felony charges under this law are not protesting or taking actions when they receive them. Mostly, racist cops dole it out in overpoliced/overcharged communities during their daily campaigns of terror.

Types of Protests

The Basics:

Actions can consist of a single one of these or a combination of any/all of them. For actions with multiple tactics it is important that the details of each one is thought through before things start. If plans have to change in the moment, have people who are the most familiar with the new required tactic provide a base idea for the group to work from in order to act as quickly and safely as possible.

Occupations:

Holding a piece of land or building(s) you are not legally allowed to hold, often done with temporary structures such as tents and barricades, and require support from outside. Due to the static nature of the protest, there is increased risk of surveillance and raids by the police. One notable example of this would be Hamilton Hall at Columbia University which has been occupied five times since 1968, most recently in early 2024 being occupied and renamed "Hind's Hall" in memory of Hind Rajab.



Camps:

Close enough to the protest to be involved but legally separate. An example of this is during the anti-DAPL protests of 2016, there was a camp separate from the main protest where people could more safely prepare and provide care.

Marches:

A moving protest. It is good to have a path set before people start moving, but this can be deviated from for safety reasons. If the path is changed, rely on people who know the area very well and are familiar with police repression patterns to avoid ending up in a worse situation.



Picket:

Like a rally, this can be a location where a mass of people congregate to perform chants, share information, or block entry or exit from a location. When blocking locations, expect repression from the police and defend the group accordingly.

Police Tactics Continued

Police will also use more subversive tactics to gather information before, during, and after protests. Surveillance of protestors and their social media is now common practice for all modern police departments, assume you're always on camera and protect your identity and information at all times. Police will also often attempt to infiltrate protests in street clothes to gather information or will attempt to blackmail protestors into revealing the identities and plans of comrades.

Sometimes police will attempt influence protests and sow division by attempting to bargain with the group or organizers, lying, leveraging peace police into dismantling the protest, and "Negotiated Management" or when police try to negotiate with those taking an action with the intent to control or minimize intended impact, without responding to the initial cause of the protest.

ALWAYS maintain situational awareness, keep an eye on the cops, and exercise good judgment. Ask yourself the following:

1. What do the police want to accomplish? (Do they want you to leave or do they want to implement mass arrests?)
2. How would they accomplish it? (How many cops would it take? How would they move to do so?)

Indications of Police Escalation:

- More than one law enforcement agency is present. While large cities have ample personnel to carry out an effective raid or mass arrest, smaller jurisdictions and college campuses will likely call in reinforcements from neighboring cities, the county, the state, federal law enforcement agencies, etc.
- A drastic increase in the sheer number of police, police cars, and/or you see a police prisoner transport van or bus (aka paddy wagon).
- They are wearing riot gear such as helmets with face shields, body armor, shields, and batons - this is often referred to as "hard tac."
- They are wearing specialized chemical weapon protection gear (gas masks).
- They are carrying arrest zip ties (especially in high redundancy).
- They have brought in barricades and/or have started blocking traffic nearby.
- They establish a "hard perimeter" not allowing entrance or exit. This may be established not only for kettling but also in an attempt to cut off support teams and press.
- They have given a dispersal order. Technically, they are supposed to give 3 dispersal orders but they don't always do that, and if they do, they don't always make the orders loud enough to hear.

Types of Protests Continued

Rallies:

These are points where a mass of people show up to perform chants and make speeches. They can be at points of power like businesses or government buildings. Situational awareness is important since staying in one location gives the repressive forces time to surveil, restrict further movement, or attack the action.



Sit Ins:

Sit Ins can simply be people sitting down in ways that interrupt the standard daily activities of a target. They can be on busy roads, entries to businesses or government buildings, or inside the buildings themselves. In cases where people are chaining themselves to immovable objects like doors or gates, be sure that the people chained do NOT have a key to their bindings. Having a key and not unlocking yourself when requested by the police can result in additional charges of resisting arrest.

Informational Distro/Radical Street Theater:

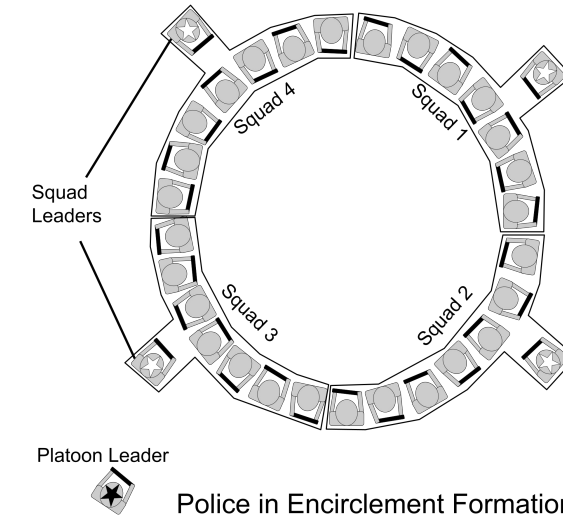
Distribution of propaganda and information through pamphlets and magazines, or through theatrical performances intended to grab the viewer's attention and share experiences and messages.



Police Tactics Continued

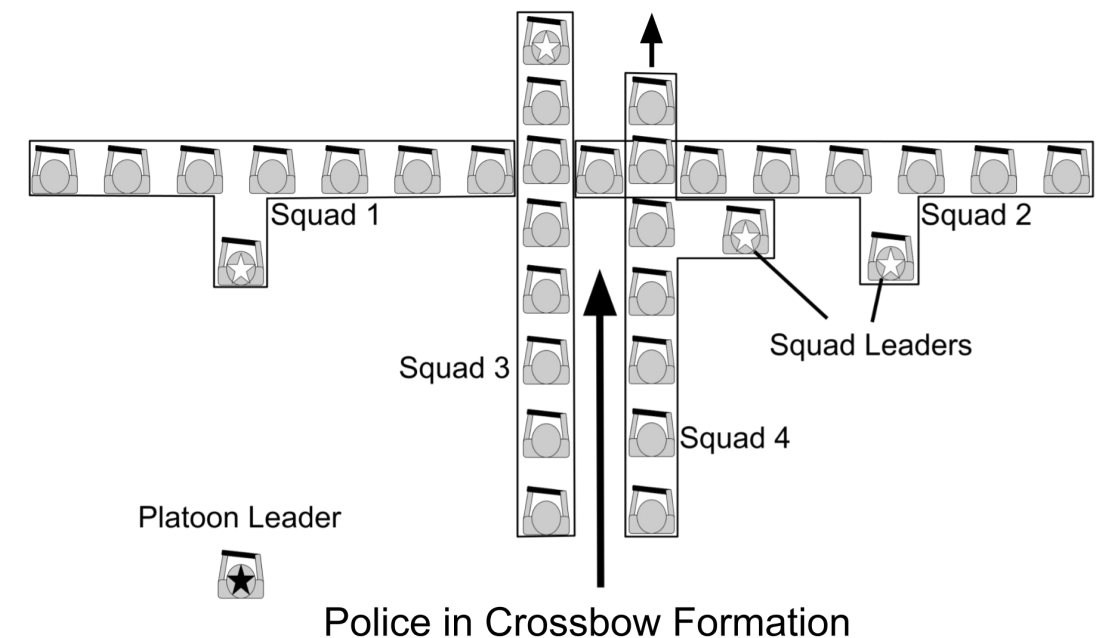
Kettling: Police encircle protestors in a formation better known as "Kettling" when they want to contain a crowd of protestors and carry out mass arrests of all those within the circle.

Hand-and-Arm Signal - Arms extended and held in a circular position above the shoulders, fingers apart.



Crossbow: Used when police want to arrest a targeted individual from out of the crowd, commonly used against organizers and those the police deem "high value targets", and are often one of the more violent arrest techniques at their disposal. One or more squads of officers will shoot through the line to arrest the person while either additional squads will move up to protect the officers and provide a corridor back to their line, or the line itself will move forward to secure the officers and arrestee.

Hand-and-Arm Signal - Two parts: The arms are raised above the head and crossed at the wrists (crossbow); then one hand grips the wrist of the other hand (arrest).



Before the Action

- If you're invited, go to planning meetings. Ideas and concerns should be addressed at these prior to the action, and are often a good way to get the vibe of how the action will go.
- Make plans as to what you will wear and bring. Double check all of your equipment.
- Make plans for safely arriving and exiting.
- Familiarize yourself with the area when possible.
- If you go alone, let a trusted person know where you're going.
- Pick an emergency rendezvous point with your buddy/group.
- Assess the arrestability level of yourself and your crew (i.e. Low Risk - leaves when/if a dispersal notice is given; Medium Risk - remains on site but stays back from the police line; High Risk - arrestable, face-to-face with police). Make collective plans in case of arrest.
- Some protest organizers may try to label their action as "family friendly", however this does not indicate the action is safe for children, and is a term that in this context has historical roots in queer exclusion.

Protest Etiquette

Interacting With Police:

- Don't. Keep your friends from doing the same, and do your best to avoid involving yourself with people or groups who do.
- "Know Your Rights" Rundown:
- IF detained, you're only required to give your name, birthdate, and identification. Do not answer any other questions. Cops can and will lie, and will use any words you say against you.

You have no legal right to defend yourself from police.

- In some states, the laws for felony resisting arrest are written so intentionally vaguely that they can even come to include verbally disagreeing with the arrest or the officer. Once their hands are on you, do NOT resist physically or verbally.
- You are legally allowed to film the police. They can give you a lawful command to move back, but they cannot give you a lawful command to cease filming. Exercise caution about having your phone unlocked while doing so, make sure to avoid filming comrades, and maintain situational awareness.

Police Tactics

Let's Review a Few Common Police Tactics:

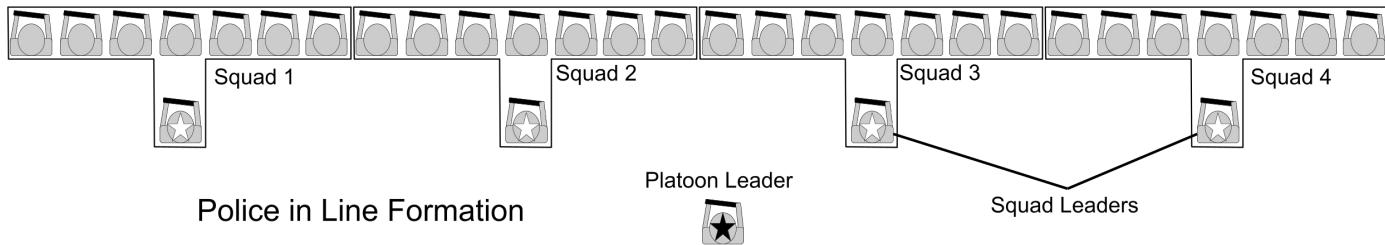
All police riot control tactics have multiple methods of execution and rely on both hand and verbal signals to coordinate. Knowing what to watch for can mean the difference between going home or going to jail. All of the below formations are often used in conjunction with tear gas and pepper spray, both used to impair visibility and breathing, and push protestors back.

Lines: The Line formation is the most commonly encountered, and is used to contain crowd movement and control the space, and provide easy backup for arrests. Be cautious of being within arms reach of the Line as they can quickly pull people behind it and arrest them.

Hand-and-Arm Signal - Arms extended and held parallel to the ground, fingers extended.

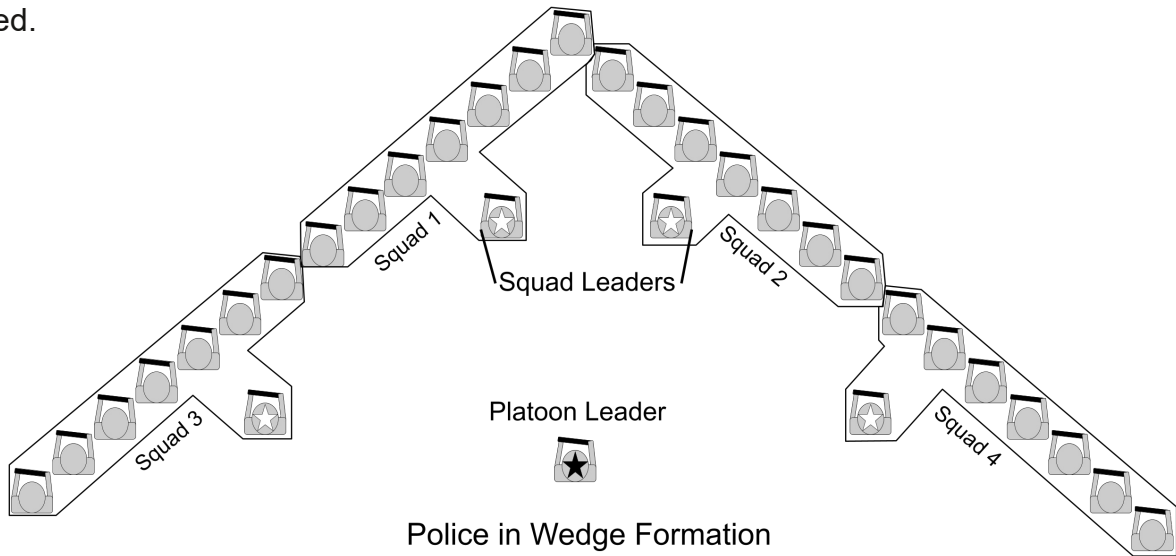
Emergency Line: The Emergency Line is structurally similar to the above, except issued for quick reactions to movement or actions.

Hand-and-Arm Signal - Holding a baton parallel to the ground, high above one's head.



Wedge: The Wedge formation is used when police want to break through a line and divide protestors. Be advised, the tip of the Wedge will not always attempt to break through in the middle of the crowd, but instead will often strike at the weakest spot in the line.

Hand-and-Arm Signal - Arms extended and held in a "V" position above the shoulders, fingers extended.



Useful Equipment

Be intentional about what you carry with you and how you carry it. If you can't move quickly or for long periods with all of your gear, you probably have too much gear. Be aware that any straps or loops can be points where you can be grabbed from. Be prepared to ditch backpacks, and don't keep anything precious to you on your person. Be aware that police may not return everything to you if arrested.

Clothes:

Knowing the type of action will help you predict what type of clothes to wear. Make sure your outfit is comfortable and movable while hiding any identifying features.

Black Bloc: If a protest calls for "bloc," or asks for people to "wear black," wear black, and nothing but black, from head to toe and try to make sure there are no visible labels or other identifying features of your attire, including underwear.

Long Sleeves/Pants: This can reduce skin exposure risks from chemical attacks as well as sunburns. Also covers identifying tattoos and markings.

Hair Ties: Long hair can get in the way of visuals, is easily grabbed by the cops, can mess with masks, and eating your own hair in a messy situation can be immensely distracting and irritating.

Balaclava: One hole or three holes. Have at least one.

Combat Attire: It is very rare that you should show up wearing combat attire. You should ONLY do so if explicitly directed to beforehand by organizers.

Jewelry: Do NOT wear jewelry, it will get broken and lost. Can be a safety issue or an identifier, especially if something you wear frequently.

PPE (Personal Protective Equipment):

Besides a mask, not all of the following items will be necessary in every situation but knowing their uses will help you decide what you do or do not need to bring to an action.

Mask: Absolutely EVERYONE should wear a mask while at any action or anytime they are in a public location, not only as a base level of community protection from airborne illness (preferably a (k)N95 for this purpose), but because they can help to conceal your identity and avoid facial recognition surveillance.

Respirator: Having something that can reduce your risk of inhaling chemicals is important! Use a respirator compatible with P100 filters or better.

Goggles (Gas/projectile Safety): ANSI Z87.1 rated for impact at the LEAST. These can protect you from things like rubber bullets, you do not want to lose an eye! Attempt to find ones or modify some to create a seal to protect from tear gas and pepper spray, however DO NOT use non-impact rated objects like swim goggles or lab goggles which could cause further eye injury.

Personal Safety

"No Face, No Case": If you cover up entirely, including eyebrows, it is very difficult to be identified and later charged with a crime.

While It might seem counter-intuitive, having your ID on you will get you processed faster at the jail. It might be the difference between going home in a few hours or having to wait until tomorrow/ the end of the weekend.

ALWAYS ALWAYS ALWAYS USE WATER to wash out pepper spray or tear gas. Seriously, water only. Don't listen to anyone that says otherwise, they are inexperienced and helping spread dangerous advice and police-produced misinformation.

Don't put your name on anything or sign any petitions at an action. The only exception to this is filling out jail support forms. (see Jail Support section)

Always operate with a buddy or a group of people and stay tight to the main group.

Be honest about your limits, not only to your crew but also to yourself. Listen to and take care of your body. Stay hydrated, eat when you need to, protect yourself from the elements, and get rest when able.

Have a safe plan for arriving and departing from the protest. Be mindful of surveillance (cameras, license plate readers, Project Greenlight, etc.) Plan to arrive and depart in attire that will obscure your identity.

Electronics Safety

Do NOT bring your phone unless you absolutely need to. Get a burner with cash in another state if you feel like you're going to want one for emergencies or filming police.

If you don't plan on filming the police, LEAVE YOUR PHONE OFF and in a faraday bag. Make sure that your phone is NOT unlockable by face ID, fingerprint, or other biometric methods. Codes only. They can't make you tell them the code but they can hold up your phone to your face or have you touch the fingerprint scanner.

In an emergency situation where your phone was in use, restart your phone and do not log into it.

Smart watches are phones and jewelry, and will track your location. Leave them at home.



Useful Equipment Continued

Walking Shoes/Comfortable Boots (ALWAYS): You will have to walk for an extended amount of time, and may even have to run to help someone or protect yourself. Make sure your footwear is sturdy and comfortable!

Golf/Strong Umbrella (Reference: Group Safety): Having a strong umbrella can offer protection from the sun, cameras, deflect chemical sprays, and may even resist water cannons when used en masse.

Glasses (NOT CONTACTS): Tear gas can fuse contact lenses to your eyeballs, remove them prior to protesting and stick to regular glasses.

Water (Drinking and cleaning): Water is not only important to fight dehydration, but it is also an essential supply for cleaning wounds and washing chemicals out of people's eyes. Do NOT use anything but water to wash out people's eyes despite what some people may tell you!

Faraday Bags: Your phone is always at risk when on your person or even in a vehicle at an action, so preventing signals from getting in or out is vital to not only your personal security but also the group's.

Snacks: Actions can be many hours long and the likelihood that you will have time to order/retrieve food is very low. Making sure you have something to keep people fed or assist those with blood sugar needs is essential for all actions, even if you think it will only be a couple hours. Granola bars in individual packages are a great option.

Medical Supplies: There is always a chance that medics will have to prioritize more serious needs, so having some medical supplies like the ones listed below can not only increase the capacity of the action to care for minor injuries, but also can make it so you are not the person taking up the medic's capacity when they could be helping others with more serious needs.

- Nitrile gloves (NOT latex)

-Israeli/H-bandage trauma dressing

-Safety Goggles (w/ side shields)

-CAT tourniquets

-Medical Tape
- Gauze, hemostatic (QuikClot)

-Chest Seals

-Trauma Shears

-Gauze, rolled (Kerlix), multiple

-Band Aids
- Mask

-Sharpie

Additional Useful Equipment:

- Personal emergency meds (inhaler, epipen, etc)

-Earplugs/Hearing Protection

-Light change of clothes, especially socks

-Poncho or rain jacket

-Flashlight

-Hat (NO logo)

-Oil based skincare products should be avoided. Can react with chemicals or get into your eyes while sweating.



Group Safety

Don't record protest participants, record the cops and antagonists. Don't post anything from a protest unless you have the consent of every single person on that video or picture (protest etiquette).

You may see people near the action wearing bright green hats and taking notes. These people are legal observers from the National Lawyers Guild whose duty is to supervise the actions of police and protestors, and to maintain a record of any pertinent events in case of future legal action, however they are not supposed to take part directly in any actions or police response.

Stay tight with the group and encourage others to do the same. Maintain good situational awareness of your surroundings.

Speak up for your own needs and the needs of others around you. Echo chants/repeat instructions that communicate crucial needs to help circulate them through the protest body.

Walk, don't run. Large groups running can contribute to panic and injuries, and also leave people behind to be arrested or assaulted.

Peace Police:
Don't be a cop. If people are engaging in action that is outside your comfort zone, mind your own business.

Spread Accurate Information, Not Panic:

Size/Strength: "20-25 cops in the area"

Actions/Activity: "Putting on riot gear and gas masks near arrest van"

Location/Direction: "Corner of 1st and Main, 3 blocks NE"

Uniform: "Local PD and State PD uniforms. SWAT insignias"

Time & Date of Observation: "9:32 pm, June 7th"

Equipment/
Weapons: "Gas masks in hip bags, canister launchers, truncheons, riot shields and helmets"

