

involvement with some group or action, received a reprimand and an education on security. That informer would quickly get frustrated. Once activists discovered that she continued to violate security precautions after being repeatedly reprimanded, they would have grounds for her dismissal. That would be one less informer for us to deal with!

## DON'T STOP HERE

It is also imperative that each of us understands our rights. Make it a priority that everyone in your group learns about the following topics:

- Grand Juries and how to deal with them
- COINTELPRO tactics for destroying movements and how to protect ourselves
- What to do if cops knock on your door
- What to do if cops stop you on the street
- What to do if you are arrested

The following are indispensable resources:

- *War at Home* by Brian Glick (South End Press)
- *If an Agent Knocks*, a pamphlet by The Center for Constitutional Rights

## ADOPT A SECURITY CULTURE NOW

Activists are restless and resistance is on the rise. People are adopting more and more effective tactics. Now, more than ever, resistance poses a serious threat to the status quo in this country. Our increased activity and effectiveness mean that the FBI, ATF, and local police will continue to escalate their COINTELPRO activities against activists. If we want our direct action to continue, it is imperative we start tightening our security and taking ourselves more seriously. Good security is certainly the strongest defense we have.

*Revised Spring 1999*

# Security culture

## What it is, why we need it and how we implement it...



Luddites; abolitionists; union organizers; revolutionaries... from large uprisings challenging the entire political structure, to isolated battles over the working conditions of a single factory, people have struggled to create a better world. Governments have always responded by jailing activists and revolutionaries, using their courts and their police forces to maintain the status quo.

As our direct action movement becomes more effective, government surveillance and harassment will increase. To minimize the destructiveness of this political repression, it is imperative that we create a security culture within our movement.



This pamphlet is essential reading for anyone who is associated with groups that advocate and/or utilize sabotage, animal liberation, or more militant tactics. The advice herein also applies to anyone who is associated with groups that practice civil disobedience, especially since membership often overlaps and gossip travels freely between groups.

**Even if you have never picked up a monkeywrench or been arrested for civil disobedience, even if you think you have nothing to hide, these guidelines will enhance your personal safety as well as the movement's overall effectiveness.** Grand juries will go after activists from all portions of a movement. And the government is not beyond fabricating evidence to convict mainstream organizers if given any kind of opportunity to build a case. The history of the FBI's COINTELPRO operations should never be forgotten. The US government has targeted groups that have advocated sabotage and groups that have not, movements that have been militant and movements that have been markedly pacifist. The government's security machinery (FBI, ATF, DEA, US Marshals, state police, local police, courts, prisons and parole officers) serves *political* objectives. There are over 200 political prisoners in the US that can testify to this from firsthand experience. By adopting a security culture, we can defeat various counterintelligence operations that would otherwise disrupt both mainstream organizing and underground resistance.

## **SO WHAT IS A SECURITY CULTURE?**

It's a culture where the people know their rights and, more importantly, assert them. Those who belong to a security culture also know what behavior compromises security and they are quick to educate those people who, out of ignorance, forgetfulness, or personal weakness, partake in insecure behavior. This security consciousness becomes a *culture* when the group as a whole makes security violations socially and morally unacceptable in the group.

You should strive to educate this person in a manner that encourages him to listen and to change his behavior. It should be done without damaging his pride. You should be humble and sincerely interested in helping him to become a better person and a more effective activist. Do not maintain a "holier-than-thou" attitude. This attitude will inevitably raise his defenses and prevent him from absorbing or using any of the advice you offer. Remember that the goal of educating him is to change his behavior, not boost your ego by showing him how much more security-conscious you are.

If possible the educational session should be conducted in private, so the person doesn't feel humiliated by a public reprimand. The educational session should occur as soon as possible after the mistake to increase its effectiveness.

If each of us takes on the responsibility of educating those who slip up, we can dramatically improve movement security. Once we recognize lying, gossiping, bragging and indirect bragging as the damaging character flaws that they are, they will soon end. When we develop a culture where all breaches of security result in an immediate response, all sincere activists will quickly get with the program.

## **DEALING WITH CHRONIC SECURITY PROBLEMS**

So what do we do with activists who repeatedly violate security precautions even after multiple educational sessions? It's unfortunate but necessary to cut them loose and kick them out of our meetings, basecamps and organizations. With the FBI doubling in size and with courts handing down stiff sentences, the stakes are too high to allow chronic security-offenders to work among us.

By creating a security culture, we have an effective defense against informers and agents who try to infiltrate groups. Imagine an informer who, every time she asked another activist about that person's



(potentially resulting in months of imprisonment), or betraying the movement by repeating the information that they were needlessly told. An activist who brags also sets a horrible example for other activists.

**Indirect-Bragging:** Indirect-braggers are people who make a big production on how they want to remain anonymous, avoid protests, and stay "underground." They might not come out and say they do illegal direct action, but they make sure everyone within earshot knows they are up to something. They are no better than braggers, but they try to be more sophisticated about it by pretending to maintain "security." However, if they were serious about security, they would just make up a good excuse as to why they are not as active, or why they can't make it to the protest (that kind of lying is definitely acceptable).

## EDUCATE TO LIBERATE

With what we now know about security, it is easy to spot those activists who compromise our movement's security. So what do we do with people who exhibit these behaviors? Do we excommunicate them from our movement? Actually, no – at least not for their first mistake.

The unfortunate truth is that there are numerous security-ignorant people in the movement and others who have been raised in a "scene" that thrives on bragging and gossiping. It doesn't mean these people are bad, but it does mean they need to be educated. Even seasoned activists can make mistakes when there is a general lack of security consciousness in our groups. And that's where those of you who are reading this can help. **We must never allow a breach of security to occur without acting to correct it.** If an acquaintance of yours is bragging about doing an action or is spreading security-compromising gossip, it is your responsibility to explain to her or him why that sort of talk violates security and is inappropriate within our movement.

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

To begin with, there are certain things that are inappropriate to discuss. These things include:

- your involvement or someone else's involvement with an underground group
- someone else's *desire* to get involved with such a group
- asking others if they are a member of an underground group
- your participation or someone else's participation in any action that was illegal
- someone else's *advocacy* for such actions
- your plans or someone else's plans for a future action

Can you see a pattern? It is wrong to speak about a specific individual's involvement (past, present or future) with illegal activities. These are unacceptable topics of discussion regardless of whether it is rumor, speculation or personal knowledge. **Please note: no one is claiming it is wrong to speak about direct action in general terms. It is perfectly legal, secure and desirable that people speak out in support of monkeywrenching and all forms of resistance. The danger lies in linking individual activists to specific actions or groups.**

## THREE EXCEPTIONS

There are only three times when it is acceptable to speak about this information. The first situation is when you are planning an action with other members of your small group (your "cell" or "affinity group"). However, you should never discuss actions over the Internet (e-mail), on the phone, through the mail, or inside an activist's home or car because these places and forms of communication are frequently monitored. The only people who should hear this discussion are those individuals who are actively partaking in this particular action. **Anyone who is not involved does not need to know and therefore should not know.**

The second exception occurs after an activist has been arrested and brought to trial.



If she is found guilty, this activist can freely speak of the actions for which she was convicted. However, she must never give information that would help the authorities determine who else participated in illegal activities.

The third exception is for anonymous letters and interviews with the media. This must be done very carefully and without compromising security. Advice on secure communication techniques can be found in other publications.

These are the only situations when it is appropriate to speak about your own or someone else's involvement in or intent to commit illegal direct action.

## SECURITY MEASURES

Veteran activists only allow a select few to know about their involvement with direct action groups. And those few consist of individuals with whom they do the action **and no one else!**

The reason for this security precaution is quite obvious: if people don't know anything, they can't talk about it. The only people who know the secret are the ones who actually face jail time if the secret gets out. If other activists who do not share the same serious consequences know who did an illegal direct action, they are far more likely to talk if harassed and intimidated by the authorities, because they will not be jailed. Even those people who are trustworthy can often be tricked into revealing damaging and incriminating information.

So it is safest for all cell members to keep their involvement in the group amongst themselves. The fewer people who know, the less evidence there is to bust them.

## SECURITY-VIOLATING BEHAVIORS

In an attempt to impress others, activists may behave in ways that compromise security. Some people do this frequently—they are habitually gossiping and bragging. Some activists say inappropriate things only when they consume

alcohol. Many activists make occasional breeches of security because there was a momentary temptation to say something or hint at something that shouldn't have been said or implied. In most every situation, the desire to be accepted is the root cause.

Those activists who tend to be the greatest security risks are people who have low self-esteem and strongly desire the approval of their peers. Certainly it is natural to seek friendship and recognition for our efforts, but it is imperative that we keep these selfish desires in check so that we do not jeopardize the safety of other activists or ourselves. People who place their desire for friendship over the importance of the cause can do serious damage to our security.

The following are examples of security-violating behaviors:

**Lying:** To impress others, liars claim to have done illegal actions. Such lies not only compromise the person's security – as cops will not take what is said as a lie – but these claims also hinder movement solidarity and trust.

**Gossiping:** Some weak characters think they can win friends by displaying that they are privy to special information. These gossips will tell others about who did what action. If they don't know anything about a particular action, gossips may talk about who they guess might be involved or they will just spread rumors about who did it. This sort of talk is very damaging. People need to remember that mere rumors are sufficient to initiate a grand jury.

**Bragging:** Some people who partake in illegal direct action might be tempted to brag about it to their friends. If someone did such a thing, it would not only jeopardize the security of the bragger and the other people involved with the action, but it places the people who he or she told at risk. They can become accessories after the fact. They can also be subpoenaed by a grand jury and forced to choose between lying to the grand jury (a serious crime), refusing to cooperate