

AFTRA

American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, AFL-CIO



TIPS FOR COVERING CIVIL DISORDER

At least half a dozen journalists have been injured or detained while covering the growing unrest in the United States.

Here are safety tips to prepare for unruly protests:

BEFORE YOU HEAD OUT

- Make sure your accreditation is in order and easily accessible.
- Alert authorities that your news organization plans to cover the protests and obtain the cell number of the person in charge.
- Take protective gear. This can include helmets, gasmasks or vests depending on what the local police force uses for crowd control.
- In case of tear gas, carry a bandana soaked in onion, lemon or vinegar, which neutralizes irritation.
- Don't wear contact lenses. Bring eye drops and spare glasses.
- In case you expect pepper spray, don't apply face crème and cosmetics. They burn on contact.
- Use earplugs for sound cannons.
- Wear comfortable boots that you can run in.
- Don natural fabrics, which are less flammable than synthetic.
- Prepare a backpack with supplies to last a day: lightweight raingear, energy bars and water, spare batteries for electronic equipment.
- Pack a medical kit and know how to use it.

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- Carry a photocopy of your press accreditation and telephone numbers of your editor and lawyer. Make sure your editor knows how to reach your family in case you are arrested or hurt.
- Set your cell phone to speed dial an emergency number.
- If possible, explore the terrain ahead of time. Are there stores you can dart into? Can you arrange to film from a high vantage point? Negotiate a “safe” place where you can retreat if mayhem erupts.

AT THE SCENE

- Don't go alone. Get someone to watch your back if you're shooting pictures.
- As soon as you arrive, spot escape routes and look for landmarks like a tall building or lamppost. It's easy to get disoriented in a crowd.
- Stay on the edge and do not get caught between police and protestors.
- Crowds have a life of their own. Stay aware of the mood.
- Alert your editors if the scene turns angry.
- Stay away from aggressive people. They may provoke a violent response.
- If planning to move, seek advisories from people who have just come from the direction you're heading.

WHEN TROUBLE ERUPTS

- Avoid horses. They bite and kick.
- Stand upwind from tear gas.
- If the police detain you, insist that they call the cell phone of their boss, whose number you just so happen to have.
- Call your lawyer and editor.
- Maintain a distance from violence.

These tips are provided courtesy of Judith Matloff, the North American Director of the International News Safety Institute. For more information, Judith may be reached via email at judith.matloff@newssafety.org.