

10 steps for setting up a blockade: an intro

First off, understand that you CAN do this.

For the last 18 months groups as small as 8 have been disrupting and occupying pipeline construction sites all over Turtle Island. It takes even fewer than that to accomplish more clandestine activities which can be equally [or more] disruptive.

The reality is that you'll take action if you want to see it done, which brings us to the second thing: it's easy to get caught up in thinking this is about one pipeline but you'd be wrong.

Those who work within this struggle understand that the fight against line 9 is one which lives and futures genuinely depend on. They understand that this is about indigenous sovereignty, colonialism and environmental racism. They know that just as much as this is about poisoned water, deforestation and global warming it's also about class and capitalism. The fight against line 9 – or line 8, line 11 or energy east [or the eastern mainline gas pipeline that will facilitate it] – is a way for those in so-called Ontario to engage against all of these things.

So why blockade?

Blockades and occupations have been successful. All of them have provided ways to spread information and dissent while building allies and networks. The weeklong occupation of an oil-pumping station last summer catapulted line 9 into the public consciousness of so-called southern Ontario and sparked solidarity actions across Turtle Island. Timed right, it also cost Enbridge financially through delays, equipment rentals and pipeline shutoffs. More recently a series of short-term occupations have disrupted work on line 9 while building momentum and minimizing risk.

Direct action works, and as long as line 9 rests in the ground operating unhindered it's a threat that can't be ignored and a fight we shouldn't forfeit. Not only would we be giving up on our duty to this earth [our mother] but we would be turning away from those who don't have the privilege of moving on to the next 'big issue' bandwagon. We would be failing to follow the example and spirit of indigenous leaders and warriors who have not given up their fight – against the tarsands and against line 9.

Be strong with them.

Build relationships. Follow their lead. Build trust with each other. And remember – we are capable and we are strong.

Find the weaknesses in your enemy and use it as an opportunity.

Enbridge policy dictates, for example, that contractors not engage with protesters. If [we] move onto a site they are to call police and wrap-up any work they've started. They won't leave [us] alone there, but they aren't going to wrestle us for control or keep operating heavy equipment.

The police also have weaknesses. Their protocols and chain of command can be one if we exert flexibility in response. Knowing their protocols and priorities can create opportunities. For example, since their priority is their own safety common sense dictates they aren't going to raid a site blindly. Other times we

can make it impossible for police to force compliance. At a recent occupation it's [reliably] rumoured that police came on site to arrest an individual in the early stages. When that individual refused to go with them police left without an arrest which allowed that individual to contribute to the blockade for another five days. What more could they do, surrounded by forty other dedicated land defenders?

Creativity is strength.

In an ode to those too fearful to even attempt subversive tactics in exposed situations: during another recent occupation it appears individuals either moved cement barrels on to the site during the occupation or built them there – in front of police and private security without tipping them off.

Other tactics can be of use against the untrained eyes of basic security watches: changes of appearance can confuse number counts, collectively obscuring your faces can provide more privacy to those especially at risk, and lighting directed at police/security during nighttime can obscure their vision if you need some privacy for a while.

Inspired? Get out there and cause some shit. Here's how.

10 Steps for Setting up a Blockade

1. Identify Your Goals

What do you want to achieve? Some common goals include interfering with the company's operations, attract media attention to spread your message, outreach, capacity building or making political stances or demands.

When you're identifying your goals, consider other factors like accessibility.

Your tactics should align with your goals. A hard blockade is more likely to achieve some goals but isn't likely to make friends with neighbours. Discuss, clarify & agree on your common goals with your crew. When a hard decision comes up, refer back to your goals for guidance [you might be surprised how often people get caught up in the moment on site].

2. Scout Potential Sites

[A really helpful tool for this part is the Ruckus Society's Scouting Manual. It can be found [HERE.](http://ruckus.org/article.php?id=809)]
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Before you throw down a blockade, you need to check out the sites available to you. What does it look like during a regular workday? What does it look like before workers show up? If it's an office building, when does it open? What are the work schedules of the staff there? What are the security concerns? If it's a site that will change over time [like a construction site] you'll want to check on the progress over time.

Take notes and pictures or draw diagrams after each visit. You can keep track of what's changed, opportunities for securing the site, angles you might want to approach and develop tentative exit plans.

List the pros and cons with your crew to suss out a site that meets your goals. As much as this means finding a secure or active site, it can also mean not burning a good place for a long term blockade if you're only planning for a short-term one. It might help to keep an eye on a few sites in case one becomes unusable.

Do your best to not be seen scouting. Use common sense and a cover story – don't stop your car or slow down too much if people are around and don't scout more often than you need to. Use different vehicles. If you have to walk to a place, look like you're hiking, walking a dog or bird watching.

3. Implications of Territory

If your blockade is going down anywhere on Turtle Island, it's on stolen Indigenous land.

If you're not traditionally from that place you need to check in with the folks who have the traditional rights to the area. In land defense especially settlers need to be taking cues and taking cues from Indigenous leaders.

Find out specifically whose land you're on. Educate yourself on the correct way to ask for a meeting with the folks in that traditional territory. Research the current issues/struggles already happening in the communities around your site. It's likely that there are people there who are already engaged in the same struggle as you so find out if they've taken action (through the courts or physically) and how. Would your action detract from theirs or compliment it?

Some communities might not support your blockade idea: Listen to why that is! Of course, there will be different perspectives from different people in any community but it's especially important in these cases to strongly weigh opposing views. If you find lots of support for your idea, collaborate with the folks there. Alternatively, be prepared to drop the action or change sites if there's strong and widespread opposition from the folks whose land you're on. If this happens don't just abandon the relationship - begin working on building meaningful relationships with the community so that we can all act together as friends and allies in the future.

Remember; it's colonization that brought most of the bullshit to Turtle Island.

4. Pick Your Target

Your goals, scouting, and consultations will probably guide you to the most ideal target.

If you want to interfere with company operations, you'll want to pick a spot where the company has a lot of work going on and a lot of money invested into. Interrupt essential work for long term blockades to maximise disruption and financial losses.

If media attention is your goal consider the what the visual appeal of the site will be, including the action and the people on it. Accessibility is a factor – make sure media won't get lost or stuck in traffic en route. If you want to mobilize a large group it's helpful to choose a site that's near public transit and easy to

find. It can be hard to arrange enough rides to get a big crowd but if people can come & go as desired it's easier to mobilize their presence long term and on short notice. Also consider accessibility factors for those using mobility/assistive devices. Consider whether your site will be family friendly & safe for radical parents & children. Think about the intersections of political concerns that exist at any particular site.

Whichever site you choose, make sure your reconnaissance is up to date and that as many organizers as possible have a solid logistical knowledge of how it's laid out.

5. get your shit together!

Regardless of the duration of your blockade, there are some things you'll want to have right away. Here are some basic but crucial supplies ANY BLOCKADE should aim for:

- Charged cell phones WITH RECEPTION for media liaisons, legal support, and site info
- A reliable internet access point (social media is our best bet to tap into the mass grassroots)
- Lawyer's phone number if folks get arrested (get everyone to write this on their bodies in sharpie!)
- Enough water and food to get you through 1 day
- A way for folks to go to the bathroom (nearby coffee shop, friendly neighbour, compost toilet)
- Cameras (including a video camera to film interactions with the cops)
- Walkie-talkies (if it's a large area)
- Sun/rain shelter
- Distro literature! Handouts, leaflets, reports, handbills or whatever for everyone who goes by
- Banners and signs to hang around site so that people know why you're there
- An already-prepared press release to send out as soon as you arrive on site
- Media talking points printed and ready for anyone who needs them
- Handouts to give to the people [neighbours & workers]
- Baked treats to give to the closest neighbours to initiate a positive first contact!
- Off-site media peeps who can get the facebook/twitter/tumblr spheres rocking

If you're planning to stick around for a while, you'll need to get your gear onsite early in case you don't get another chance. For longer term blockades, be sure to plan for these supplies:

- Tents
 - Sleeping bags
 - Coolers
 - Batteries/charging stations to recharge phones and computers
 - More permanent internet access point (such as hotspot or rocket stick)
 - Tarps
 - Poles
 - Chairs, and any other supplies to build shelters and other things you want on site.
 - Chalkboard for setting up security shifts and rotating camp roles
 - Name tags (for people who are using aliases)
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7. Create an Entrance Plan

How are you going to take the site? How many people do you need to do it safely? Are you anticipating an immediate confrontation with workers? Do you have to overcome any physical obstacles to accessing the site? Is there already a police or private security presence there?

Answering these questions will help you plan your deployment. Make sure to communicate the risks clearly, and that the people you have coming are comfortable with the situation you anticipate.

You also will probably want to get your crew together nearby before you move onto the site so you can enter with a strong presence. Choose somewhere out of the way or somewhere people naturally congregate. Once there, make sure everyone with a major role (ie. police and media liaison) identifies themselves to the group at large.

As soon as you're on site, have one or two people check for useful things. This can include construction supplies, keys to the trailer or equipment, site maps etc. Ensure surveillance cameras get covered by fabric, paper or paint.

6. Fill Roles

You'll need some basic (but important!) roles filled right away, most of which are the same as you'd have at any action. We suggest having people assigned, in advance, to the following roles for the first day:

- Police liaison
- Company/worker liaison
- Media liaison
- Internal media spokespeople (for social media and writing stuff)
- Logistics team (for planning and overseeing the physical blockade setup)
- Legal support
- Front gate crew (hand out literature to people as they pass by, greet new people who arrive)
- Neighbour liaisons

The only way to get good at any of these roles is through experience. It's common for more experienced activists to step up and take on specialized roles because they're more comfortable doing them but we should all learn to be able to fill these roles in a pinch. You never know when someone will be occupied or restricted in some way.

If your blockade is going to last for several days also consider creating rotating shifts for things like overnight security and food prep. Chalkboards are great tools for easily posting the roles that need to be filled for certain time periods.

8. Get a System Going

For as long as you're at this blockade, it's your home. As people come and go, you'll need to keep filling roles. Keep in mind that organizing the kitchen and emptying the compost toilet are just as crucial as

writing press releases. It can help to have a role manager for checking on the shifts chalkboard and reminding the group to sign up for jobs but ultimately everyone needs to take responsibility for making sure camp runs as smoothly as possible.

Keeping a solid presence is crucial for deterring the company and the cops from having our asses dragged off site. Organize fresh injections of individuals through public rideshares or reaching or reaching out to fellow community members.

If you're on site for a while it's good to keep people talking about how things are going. Have check-in conversations about what might need work around the camp or what practises are effective. As much as you're caught up in the present always discuss the future of your action – are you losing legal support or getting low on people? How are people feeling about police presence or interactions? Does anyone need relief from certain roles? Are there updates for online wishlists?

A big part of security culture lies in solid communication. A public occupation is going to draw in lots of people. Have a way to greet these new individuals and speak with them. Consider having public/private areas of the camp. Have meaningful discussions with them [“I’ve never met you before. Tell me about yourself.]. Also – don’t talk about illegal shit. Period.

We need to remember that cops and security guards are always watching and always listening. We need to accept that someone on site might be an undercover or informant and that public posts and information is being monitored and compiled. For these reasons it’s reasonable to take counter measures such as using fake names and changing up or obscuring appearances. Wearing name tags can remind people what name to call us at an action.

9. Keep it Interesting

Once you've been there for a day, what do you do next? If you disappear from the media, you'll likely lose some public support by the time the cops come clear you out. Even if you're only planning to be there for a day, you can inject interest throughout the day. You can do teach-ins, concerts, street theatre, games, or highlight different spokespeople the media might be interested in. Keep focused on your goals, but have fun too! Show people the kind of community we're trying to create.

In terms of keeping it interesting for the peeps on site, blockades are a great place to skill share! Issue a call-out for workshops on topics you want to get better at. Ask a fellow blockader for tips and tricks on how to tie knots or distract a cop. We have a wealth of knowledge combined with a set time and place - let's use it!

10. Make Several Exit Plans

What are you going to do when it looks like a hundred cops are going to come in and drag you all out?

The cops are going to tell you that you have to leave from the start, but if you have more than 20 people you can usually manage to stay for much longer after you've been told you're trespassing. Cops won't act without having at least a basic understanding of the situation. They aren't going to raid the site unless

they can match our numbers – empower yourself and call their bluff.

When arrest seems imminent an exit plan is important so you have something to refer to when your mind is in a partial panic. Your response depends on your goals and people's comfort/risk levels. If your goal is to disrupt work for as long as possible think of ways that you can extend your presence or otherwise disrupt work. This can range from having an excellent police liaison that can swindle more time to “pack up” to launching in to personal lockdowns or physical blockades of the site.

Locking down can keep the blockade going for many more hours, make a strong statement of commitment and drive the media into a frenzy. It doesn't take many individuals willing to risk themselves or much money to be effective but you may need things like extra water, food, mats, blankets and diapers – as well as the physical means for whichever lockdown method you choose.

If some folks aren't willing or able to be arrested they can likely offer needed support in other areas such as packing the site up and being responsible for the gear of those who will be arrested. Getting food off-site and stored safely is important since it will otherwise end up as waste. Identify and remove priority items like media equipment. Have an exit plan for any pets. There are also ongoing media & police liaison and legal support roles to keep lawyers informed and those locking down as safe as possible. Eventually there may also be jail and court support roles.

No matter how prepared you feel police arriving on site en masse changes the dynamic of an action. Everything you do will feel rushed and panicked. It's important to have a good and flexible exit plan. That includes pre-writing media releases and finding out likely police stations and courthouses. Those locking down or supporting lockdown folks should have a more specific step-by-step plan of what will happen when a police raid is imminent.
