

Reporting on 'eco-terrorism' sabotage and vandalism

A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS

How journalists report claims of 'eco-terrorism' can have a major impact on the lives of innocent people and profoundly affect debate over important matters of public policy.

Here are eight things to consider.

1. If you receive an anonymous tip off, a media statement by industry, police or politicians claiming some incident is the work of 'eco-terrorists' or 'saboteurs', be alert to the possibility that you could be the target of a disinformation stunt.
2. The use of the word 'eco-terrorist' was popularised by anti-environmental groups and PR companies in the US.
3. The term 'eco-terrorism' implies a proven environmental motivation before the conclusion of an investigation, gathering and testing of evidence.
4. Describing the incident with the 'eco-terrorist' tag falsely accuses a group of people of a criminal action. When such terms are used in the media some in the community take the claim as 'fact' and may use it as the basis for harassment and violence against innocent people.
5. If there is no conclusive proof (as distinct from circumstantial 'evidence' like a banner, leaflet or anonymous letter or message) it is best to avoid using the word 'eco-terrorism' altogether.
6. Commonly police and industry insiders handling extortion threats or sabotage warn that publicising an incident can

generate a spate of 'copy cat' incidents at a ratio of about thirty to the original one.

7. Do not accept claims that environmental motivation is obvious, test the available information against other possible scenarios. Has there been other vandalism occurring in the area? Have there been prosecutions and convictions in the past for similar incidents?

8. The possibility of damage to machinery being undertaken deliberately to discredit environmentalists should be taken seriously. A 1995 Victorian Police memo explicitly warned investigating officers of the possibility that incidents could be attempts to discredit environmental groups.

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- *Countering claims of 'eco-terrorism': a compilation of source materials and*
- *Reporting on 'eco-terrorism', sabotage and vandalism: a resource kit for journalists.*

Defend the Defenders

May 2002

Published by:
Environment Defenders Office (EDO) Victoria
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Other guides in this series are available at www.edo.org.au.