

Organising a Legal Support System

This information sheet provides some suggestions for organising legal support for your action. We also recommend that you also read the very comprehensive guide by Activists Legal Project, at <http://www.activistslegalproject.org.uk/Legal%20Support1.pdf>

You should discuss what type of support people in your group want, and tailor the type of support you provide to the group's needs.

If you are a small affinity group, you will only need one or two people to help with legal support. A driver is useful. If your action takes you to places where observers cannot observe without being arrested, then you need to work out how to adapt the ideas below to suit your needs. For example, you may need to agree a signal or a text if members of your group have entered AWE, and have been arrested.

There is a difference between Legal Observing and Legal Support.

Legal Observing systems vary. Some focus on:

- monitoring who is arrested; and/or
- monitoring the police; and/or
- monitoring any violence/unlawful activity by police to assist in complaints/prosecutions against the police.

Legal Support:

- aims to support activists taking direct action, from arrest to release
- may also provide a support group for defendants
- may also provide court support.

The system below can be used by one Legal Observer/Supporter or by a large Legal Support Team for large groups or simultaneous multiple actions. If this is a large action, you may need a Legal Support Back Office to do the paperwork.

Before the Action: You need to Know

- Knowledge is power: Take responsibility for your own actions, read the legal briefing.
- Legal observers have no special status.
- Legal observers must not take part in the action. If you are arrested, you are not supporting anyone, and there may be no one to support you.

At a minimum: Bust Card and Legal Briefing

If you cannot or do not want to provide Legal Support, give a **Bust Card** to everyone involved in the action. (This includes everyone – even people who think they will not get arrested). Make sure everyone has read the **Legal Briefing**

Who?

This depends on the size of your group or action. You need

- Trained legal observers
- Someone to take responsibility for the Legal Support telephone number. (This could be a member of the group observing the action, or someone at home or in a back office.)
- Driver or drivers (if you plan to fetch people from police stations)
- Name of lawyer or firm of solicitors who will provide free legal advice

A Legal Observer needs

- Notebook and pen
- Mobile phone
- Camera (if appropriate)
- Bust cards
- High visibility vests (if appropriate)
- The Legal Support number (put it in your phone)

STAGE 1: during the action

Legal observers observe and record

- names given by people arrested, (full name is best, first names are better than nothing)
If you are in an affinity group, you will know the names of people in your group, which makes it much easier to trace who has been arrested.
- time and place of arrest
- number of the arresting officer
- reason for arrest
- if arrestee is injured
- unusual or unlawful arrests
- police station the arrested person will be taken to (if possible)

STAY CALM

If someone is being hurt by the police:

- ask the police calmly to stop what they are doing,
- note the time, location and details of what was being done
- note the number of each officer involved and
- what they were doing to the arrested person

Keep your distance, don't get in the way of anyone's arrest; it won't help the person being arrested and you may be threatened with arrest or arrested for obstructing a police officer.

STAGE 2: When the action is over and it look like there will be no more arrests

If you are working in a large Legal support Team, ring in all arrests to the back office/Legal support number.

This person/persons should make a list or table of arrestees, so you can track them until they are released.

This should include:

- Person arrested:
- Time/place arrested:
- Arrested for:

When you get the information you can also record:

- Police station: (where they are being held)

And on release, you can add further information, see **Stage 4**

STAGE 3: While you are waiting

LS (Legal support) tries to find out which police stations people have been taken to

LS receives or makes phone calls to police station/s, and adds any new information to information already on the list

LS tries to find out if anyone needs a lawyer, and/or whether they have been able to call lawyers

LS tries to find out how long before people will be released, and tells driver (if available) with transport coordinator.

LS rings lawyer to see if they have had any calls, and notes down any relevant details

STAGE 4: When you know some people will be released

LS/Drivers go (with map, directions, mobile phone) to collect people from police station

If you do not have a vehicle, and cannot pick people up, it would be good to tell people before arrest where the nearest train station or bus stop is, so they can get home. You can find out what happened to them over the phone.

It is nice to have some food, drinks etc for people when they get out.

When people are released, Legal Supporters need to record

- get details of charge (if any); record if they have not been charged, or if they have accepted a caution;
- bail conditions (including police bail),
- any court date and contact details, including mobile phone number.
- Gives them number or email to contact for further support.
- Help sort out any transport or other problems

If you are working in a big team, ring the Legal Support Team who can add the information to their list.

STAGE 5: After you think its all over

- Chase up lost people or loose ends
- If people refuse bail conditions or have a warrant out or are still detained – make sure they have access to a lawyer if they want.