



Common Animal Activist Strategies

The following is a list of some of the most common tactics employed by animal rights groups when targeting organizations that conduct health research using animals. This is by no means a comprehensive list of all the strategies that can be employed. But it does provide organizations with an accurate picture of the variety of challenges they may face.

Protests

Campus or business-focused protests have always been one of the main tactics employed by animal activist groups.

Possible responses

- Consider having campus police develop a map, in conjunction with lawyers, that highlights public areas versus private areas. Restricting protests to public areas is fine, but institutions need to know for certain what the boundaries are. Also, it may be a better idea to allow a protest in a private area that is lower traffic than in a high-traffic public area.
- Have a press person available to talk to the media if they show up. Consider letting reporters talk to the protesters first so that you can respond and counter their claims. (One strategy is to begin the interview by asking the reporter to summarize their previous discussion with activists.)
- Have materials on-hand about the research in question for reporters or for members of the public who often ask what is going on when the protestors are in a visible location.
- Make sure that there is a police presence, but not at levels that appear to be overkill.
- Formalize partnerships with local police, including law enforcement that protect the homes of impacted researchers and staff, in case assistance is needed. In addition, make certain that local police understand any security risks associated with the protests.

Note: There is a relatively long list of things you can do to prepare for and manage campus protests. AMP is available to discuss this further if you wish.



Event Disruptions

Recognize that many animal rights groups closely track university websites and social media pages looking for information and opportunities to get their message across. For example, some groups look for opportunities to disrupt public or even private talks. [For example, at Texas A&M, PETA has repeatedly disrupted events where the university president is scheduled to speak.](#)

Possible responses

- Make sure campus police are aware of all public events where the targeted researcher or university officials will speak.
- Have fact sheets about the research in question on hand at public events if needed. If a protest occurs, a spokesperson can tell the audience that “information about the research in question is on a table at the back of the room.” They can then quickly move on with the event once the disturbance is taken care of.
- Have campus police collaborate with facility security at large off-campus events, if it is suspected that a disruption will occur.
- Instruct the event master of ceremonies what they should do if a protest is expected. (Example: Make sure they refrain from trying to stop the protest themselves and allow trained security staff to handle the issue.)

Lab Disruptions

While less common, activists have occasionally entered research labs to protest. They are not known to cause damage, but of course, a disturbance in the lab can be very frightening,

Possible responses

- Make sure lab doors remain closed.
- Instruct all staff to make certain that additional persons do not follow them into the lab when entering or exiting
- Remind staff to wear ID tags at all times and question those not wearing IDs.

Social Media Campaigns

While animal rights groups frequently conduct campaigns that make extensive use of traditional news media, they are also very skilled with social media campaigns. This includes:

- Frequent posts/vandalism on university or company social media pages.
- Posts on activist social media pages to encourage supporters to send emails to university/company staff or the bombarding of social media pages owned by the university/company or targeted staff.
- Targeting of donors or affiliated institutions. For example, PETA's campaign against Texas A&M has featured the targeting of institutions that collaborate with the university on their muscular dystrophy research in dogs. **(see above photo).**

PETA Calls for School to Reconsider Contract With Texas A&M for Cruel Muscular Dystrophy Experiments on Dogs

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Gainesville, Fla. – PETA has obtained federal records revealing that the University of Florida (UF) contracted with Texas A&M University (TAMU) to conduct experiments on 3-month-old golden retriever puppies who were deliberately bred to have a severe, painful form of canine muscular dystrophy.

In a letter sent to UF President W. Kent Fuchs today, PETA calls on the school to reconsider all contracts with the TAMU dog laboratory in light of the [eyewitness video footage](#) that shows dogs held in barren conditions in the TAMU laboratory, where they can be seen struggling to walk, swallow, and even breathe. PETA points out that muscular dystrophy experiments on dogs haven't translated to humans and that 35 years of such experiments haven't resulted in a treatment to reverse the symptoms of the disease.

Possible responses

- Impacted staff should revisit privacy settings and be prepared to alert authorities to strange or threatening communications.
- Social media staff should work in conjunction with other staff in responding to threats. They should also coordinate messaging with other communicators.

Pressuring Donors

- At times, activist groups contact donors and pressure them to discontinue support of research or they might pressure donors to more specifically define how their gift can be used (restricting the gift to non-animal studies).

Possible responses

- Proactively consider any security issues surrounding the public listing of donors on web pages.
- Consider discussions with donors about the chance of protests, calls, emails. (if the risk exists.)

Public Records Requests

One extremely common tactic for animal rights groups is the use of public records requests to obtain data that could be used to paint a negative picture of the targeted institutions. For example:



- The use of USDA inspection reports to claim that an organization has animal care issues.
- The use of OLAW reports to paint a similar picture.
- Requests for university emails pertaining to a particular research study, which could then be quoted out of context

Possible responses

- Review records retention policies. Consider both written records and media (photos, videos)
- Establish regular communications between the press office and the office that manages records requests. The press office should be looped-in when OLAW letters are being sent in or when the institution receives a USDA inspection report.
- Consider posting USDA inspection reports online (with an explanation of the report in lay-language) to illustrate transparency and a commitment to good animal care. AMP's experience is that posting these reports prevents attempts by activists to misuse these documents or overstate their conclusions.
- When an incident occurs, consider proactively announcing it in the interest of transparency. This is particularly a good idea when an institution knows that activist groups are submitting records requests so that they can announce any "infractions" and paint them in the worst possible light.

Lobbying/Attempts to Author or Change Local Laws

Animal activists are increasingly attempting to restrict research by lobbying legislators. For example:

- A DC-based animal rights group is attempting to restrict certain types of research taking place at the VA, USDA and FDA.
- Activist groups are sponsoring statewide adoption laws (laws aimed at formalizing the adoption of research animals once they have taken part in a study.) These laws give activist groups a new public relations venue. At times, these laws are specifically written to create new regulatory challenges for research organizations.
- Activists have also attempted to create city-wide legislation that would prohibit certain types of research or facilities that breed animals for use in research.

Possible responses

- Ensure that government relations staff is fully-briefed on the use of animals at the research and contacted when and if issues or challenges arise.
- Coordinate media messaging with government relations messaging to ensure they are not in conflict.

Pressuring an Institution for Increased Transparency

Occasionally, activists pressure an institution to let reporters or the public inside. There have even been cases where activists show up unannounced at a research facility, along with local reporters, to make claims of abuse and demand entry to inspect the facilities for themselves.

Possible responses

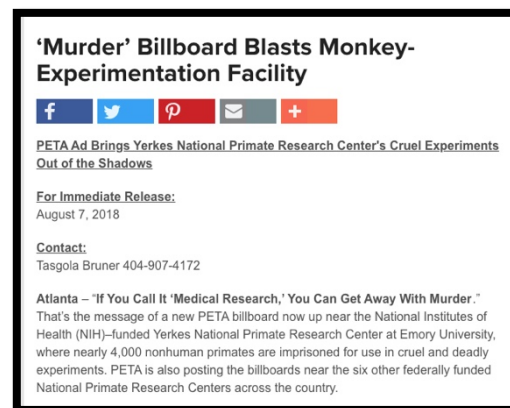
- Make sure security staff are aware of this possibility and know how to respond.
- Consider inviting a trusted local reporter to visit the labs and meet the researchers. Stories like these have several benefits, including the transparency they provide.

Billboards/Cable TV Ads

PETA has increasingly been using billboards to target institutions. For example, the group recently started putting up billboards near the National Primate Research Centers. PETA has also placed a billboard at the University of Delaware. Animal rights groups are also known to purchase ads on local cable stations.

Possible responses

- Sometimes, advertising companies reverse their decisions to partner with an animal rights group when a respected university or business contacts them.
- Consider speaking with university/company marketing staff about this risk. They may have contacts at advertising companies that can contact them when PETA or another animal rights group attempts to purchase local advertising.





Partnering with Like-Minded Groups

At times, animal activist groups partner with other organizations when they identify shared goals.

- For example, a DC-based activist group named White Coat Waste Project, has partnered with an activist critical of global warming science, to target the EPA (which conducts animal studies as part of its mission.)
- Another example: Animal rights groups have partnered with the ACLU, when it comes to the issue of public records requests.

Tertiary Targeting

Activists will sometimes target companies that provide goods or services to a research organization. Examples:

- External companies that provide cleaning and janitorial services
- Food service companies
- Delivery companies

Possible responses

- Ensure that business partners have a general understanding as to why and how research is conducted at the facility. Offer them opportunities to learn and ask questions about the role of animals in research.
- Make certain that partners are aware that they could be contacted by activist groups.
- Inform partners of upcoming protests during business hours, so that they can adjust delivery schedules/planned service visits as needed and avoid confrontations.