



Tips for Investigators Who Find Themselves the Target of an Animal Rights Campaign

For many scientists, being targeted by an animal rights group is a new, frustrating and at times, frightening experience. Some groups have been known to protest at scientists' homes or target them personally at conferences or other public speaking engagements. Many researchers are naturally concerned about the impacts on their spouse and/or children. Others worry that neighbors (if impacted) will quickly grow tired of the disruption. Below is some information and advice for scientists who have newly become the target of an animal rights campaign.

Immediately Contact Administration and Security

Once you learn you are being targeted by activists, contact the campus security office. In response, they may increase surveillance efforts or have advice for increasing security at your lab. In some cases, they may reach out to local police to make sure they are also aware of the situation. Security staff may also have some advice for ensuring safety at home or at public speaking engagements.

AMP also advises that you contact your department administrator and/or the research office. They can offer assistance. Plus, some animal rights groups urge their supporters to contact university leadership, so it is helpful to provide advance warning to these individuals.

Contact Americans for Medical Progress and Other Partners

Americans for Medical Progress has staff on hand with years of experience dealing with animal rights campaigns targeting individual scientists. We can share the lessons learned from our wide-ranging experiences (in addition to the advice provided in this fact sheet.)

Identify the Source and Consider Their Past Actions

Not all animal rights organizations are the same and they all use different tactics. Take For example, Ohio-based Stop Animal Exploitation Now. SAEN is a very small group run out of a PO box with a handful of volunteers. Their campaigns mainly consist of wide-reaching records requests to public agencies and institutions. They then use the results when contacting local media and alleging animal abuse or mistreatment. Some of their actions are successful. Some are not. But of course, the media attention they generate often has negative consequences as these allegations - true or false - build or add to negative public perception. It is important to note however, that most SAEN campaigns last days, not weeks. So the attention will most likely be temporary.



On the other hand, PETA is at times known for launching anti-research campaigns that can last several months or even years. Many of the National Primate Research Centers have been longtime targets of PETA. As a result they've been the subject of infiltrations, billboard and TV ads and other reputation-damaging strategies.

Knowing what will likely come next is critical for planning purposes. AMP has created a list of common activist strategies and proposed responses. This document can be found [at this link on the AMP Partner Resources portal](#). [Contact us](#) if you require access.

If You Think You're Facing a Long-term Animal Rights Campaign, Consider Speaking With Another Scientist Who Has Also Been Targeted

Remember that you are not alone and plenty of other scientists have faced similar challenges. Often, speaking with these individuals can put things into perspective or generate helpful advice. Americans for Medical Progress can put you in touch with other scientists who have faced these same kinds of situations. [Contact us](#) if we can help.

Make Sure Someone Is Keeping an Eye Out for Future Protests and Actions

Americans for Medical Progress tracks animal rights claims daily. When we learn of an upcoming protest or another action, we contact the targeted institution to let them know. However, it's also helpful for each biomedical research organization to set up some security surveillance systems of their own. This work includes creating specialized Google Alerts and keeping an eye out for posts on public Facebook pages run by activist groups. [Contact AMP](#) for advice on proactively identifying future challenges.

Identify a Key Contact in the Communications Office, Invite Them to the Lab

One of the best ways to combat animal rights claims is via transparency and facts. If you are targeted, identify the communications person assigned to your department and encourage them to visit the lab to learn about your work. The goal is to provide that person with information and resources to proactively and reactively defend your research.

Work with Communications Staff to Develop Messaging for Future Use

Whether a campaign is likely to last days or weeks, it's always a good idea to work with communications staff to generate messages about the studies in question and the role of animals in that research. Be sure to include:

- Why the research is being conducted.
- Who will benefit and how.
- Why animal studies are necessary.
- Why a specific species is being studied.
- What has been learned from animal studies in the past.
- What you hope to ultimately accomplish.
- Protocols and controls in place to ensure the good care of animals.
- Statements that communicate empathy and the dedication to ensure animals are treated well.



Consider What People Will Find if They Search for More Information, Use That to Your Benefit

As we all know, it's not uncommon for people to immediately search the Internet for more information when they hear about something new. This is why it's a good idea to review your lab webpage and make sure it provides important context and details so the general public can understand and appreciate the work you are doing. It's actually not unusual for an organization to expand the information about animal studies on their website in response to animal rights allegations. **See more information in the below FAQ about dealing with sensitive information sometimes posted on lab webpages.**

If You Work at a Public Institution, Consider Contacting the Office That Manages Records Requests

Many animal rights campaigns feature records requests. The public records coordinator should therefore promptly be made aware when your lab is being targeted. You should also urge them to loop-in the communications office if and when a request about your lab's operations is received.

Q&A

Q: Should I inform students and staff?

A: If you expect to be targeted for weeks or even months, AMP advises that you talk to your lab staff and tell them what is going on. You can suggest they be careful about what they post on social media and advise them not to engage. You should also tell them to immediately report any emails from research opponents, especially those that are threatening in nature.

Q: Should I tell my family?

A: Again, if you suspect the animal rights campaign will be long-term, family members should likely be made aware. Tell your spouse and older children what to do if they receive strange calls or emails and advise them not to respond. We do however urge caution about having these conversations with younger children. Every child is different, and some kids become frightened when they learn of animal rights campaigns targeting their parents.



Q: Should I talk to my neighbors?

A: AMP advises that you have conversations with neighbors IF you believe home protests or likely or IF one is announced and approaching. (See previous advice on monitoring for future protest actions.) Warning neighbors about home protests allows you to:

- Explain your research (using lay language of course) and talk about why it is necessary to improve health or develop important knowledge.
- Proactively debunk false claims that the activists may chant or share on fliers or printed signs.
- Help neighbors make sure their families are prepared. Some young children can become frightened when activists show up outside. Therefore, a warning will likely be appreciated.

Often times, neighbors can be strong advocates for a researcher and their family. Few Americans support targeting people at home. At the same time, it's not a good idea for neighbors to angrily confront activists. One of the reasons why research opponents conduct home protests is to capture negative responses on camera and share them via social media.

Q: What can I personally do to increase lab security?

A: Ensure lab doors remain locked - even during business hours - and make sure they are not blocked open. Tell staff to be on the lookout for people who do not belong in the lab or visitors lacking proper ID. Tell staff to alert you immediately if they receive strange or threatening calls or emails. **Note: Actions targeting individual labs are rare, but they have occurred.**

Q: Should I change my website?

A: AMP believes transparency and communications are incredibly important for combatting animal rights claims. At the same time, it's a good idea to review the contents of your site if you are targeted. Consider whether staff photos and phone numbers or email addresses should be removed for safety purposes. Look for language or photos that could be misconstrued or misused and proactively address those issues. You may also wish to add lay-language explanations of your research or provide important context. It's actually common for scientists to expand their websites in the face of animal rights activism.



Q: Should I Change My Behavior on Social Media?

A: Unfortunately, some groups and individuals target scientists and their staff via their personal social media accounts. In response, you may consider tightening security on those accounts at least temporarily. For instance, you may decide to make your Facebook page only viewable to family and friends. You should also be careful about what you post on Twitter. We also urge scientists to avoid getting into online debates with activists. Many times, opponents see this as an opportunity to gather information or generate an angry response which they can then use to portray you in a negative light.

Q: What should I do if the university isn't doing enough to defend my work?

A: In many cases, universities go to great lengths to protect their scientists when they are targeted by activist groups. But sometimes, it requires a little urging. Consider contacting security staff, research administration or communications leadership if you feel more can be done. But in doing so, try to avoid criticizing others. Voice staff and personal safety concerns and remind them that the institution could face reputational damage if they fail to respond comprehensively.