

UK climate protesters undeterred despite govt threats

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Just Stop Oil is mounting a month-long series of protests in London.

Britain's Home Secretary Suella Braverman had a stark warning this week for direct-action protesters who use "guerilla tactics" to bring "chaos and misery" to the public.

"Whether you're Just Stop Oil, Insulate Britain or Extinction Rebellion, you cross a line when you break the law—and that's why we'll keep putting you behind bars," she said.

Braverman's threat came as the Just Stop Oil coalition group, which wants an end to new fossil fuel licensing and production, embarked on a month-long series of protests in central London.

Dozens have been arrested this week for blocking roads and bridges, after similar protests that have brought gridlock to Britain's motorways, blocked [oil refineries](#) and seen petrol pumps damaged.

Two Greenpeace protesters interrupted a speech by Prime Minister Liz Truss's on Wednesday, accusing the government of backsliding on its commitments to reduce fossil fuel use and ban fracking.

Truss said Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion were part of an "anti-growth coalition" with [trade unions](#) and the main opposition Labour party determined to derail her [economic reforms](#).

"The fact is they prefer protesting to doing. They prefer talking on Twitter to taking tough decisions," she told the Conservative party conference.

But activists insist they are also taking action to highlight the [climate emergency](#), which was blamed for pushing temperatures above 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in Britain this year for the first time



Home Secretary Suella Braverman warned the government will get tough on protest groups using 'guerilla tactics'

In London this week, threats of arrest—and tougher laws to come—failed to discourage protesters, many of whom took time off work and travelled from outside London.

"I'm prepared to be arrested because the thought of absolute social destruction is a lot worse," retail worker Theresa Higginson, 24, who locked herself onto another protestor via a metal tube as they blocked a road at Trafalgar Square, told AFP on Thursday.

"We don't want to do this," added animal rights activist Gemma Barnes, 32. "We don't want to be here."

"But they (the government) have left us no other choice. We believe at this point that the only way to enact change is through civil resistance."

'They did nothing'

Direct-action protests about climate change have escalated in Britain in recent years, led by Extinction Rebellion and allied groups.

Insulate Britain, which campaigns for more energy efficient homes, first came to public attention by blocking London's busy M25 orbital motorway last year.

Just Stop Oil protesters have tried to disrupt an English Premier League football match by tying themselves to goalposts and got onto the track at the Silverstone circuit during the Formula One British Grand Prix.



Previous protests include attempts to disrupt an English Premier League football match.

Activists have glued themselves to the frames of well-known works of art at galleries around Britain and targeted the red carpet of the BAFTA awards.

The right-wing tabloid press regularly labels the protesters "eco-anarchists" and "eco-zealots".

But in London this week, protesters said they were far from being stereotypical activists.

Instead they said they were normal people voicing public concern about [climate change](#) in Britain and around the world and "terror" about the future.

"It's a luxury for us to be able to ignore it, to get on with our everyday life," said former art school librarian Emma Brown, 30, referring to devastating recent floods in Pakistan.

Retiree Kris Welsch, 69, said police called in to deal with the protests were sympathetic and polite, giving multiple opportunities to abandon their roadblocks before they moved in to arrest them.

"They treat us with respect and we treat them with respect. They understand that they might have to deal with food insecurity and civil unrest in the coming years," she added.

"This is the least I can do for the up and coming generations," she said.



Activists have also glued themselves to well-known works of art at galleries.

The government's new Public Order Bill is winding its way through parliament, proposing to criminalise "lock-on" tactics and ban the obstruction of major transport work.

Just Stop Oil likened itself to the Suffragettes who campaigned for votes for women, Nelson Mandela's anti-Apartheid struggle and Russians speaking out against the war in Ukraine.

"We are undeterred. Oil is killing people, now," it said.

Gabriella Ditto, a 28-year-old mobiliser for the group, told onlookers at Thursday's roadblock that they had no choice.

"Before we got to this point, we sent some petitions, we sent some strongly worded emails and we wrote to our MPs," she said.

"And they did nothing."

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