



Protecting Critical Infrastructure Sites from Opposition Attacks

It doesn't matter how desperately the infrastructure may be needed, how carefully designed the facility is (with safety, safe operation and environmental safeguards at the forefront) or the positive economic impact it stands to deliver to the community. There inevitably will be people who disagree with the development of new infrastructure or wish to see existing infrastructure taken out of operation. Unfortunately, opposition to new or existing critical infrastructure results in attacks to the very facilities that keep our economy and communities running smoothly.

Projects that once seemed easy to approve and build, and that would be welcome in communities and contribute to the tax base, are now a challenge. Wind farms are the most recent infrastructure projects to draw the ire of some environmentalists who fight against them for the sake of sound and sight pollution, or the risk turbines pose to birds. Replacing old pipelines with newer, better and safer systems continues to be a source of contention.

Being proactive in understanding the various local and national issue groups, their varying concerns and positions on critical infrastructure, and having a plan for responding with both effective community engagement and security measures can help keep infrastructure on track and operational.

TAKING STOCK

For starters, every infrastructure operator should take a complete and thorough inventory of operational risks. Consider the mild to wild negative scenarios, who will be impacted by each and the full scope of the consequences of every potential incident. From there, take a deep dive with engineering to know and document all of the processes, tools and technologies that are in place to prevent accidents so that you are always prepared to address a question, respond quickly to issues and not be blindsided.

Knowing your operational risks will maximize the effectiveness of security assessments and mitigation planning, including determining the level of manpower needed for a response. Since you may not have company security present at all critical infrastructure sites, it is also important to know what resources you have available to surge to the problem. Are local law enforcement agencies well-staffed and available to support in a time of crisis? What other resources may be available to you, and are the necessary contracts and agreements in place to activate quickly?

From there, take a deep dive on opposition groups. Ask the following questions and document the answers.

- Which groups are most likely to oppose this project?
- Which local groups are allied with national-level organizations that can invest financial, logistical and media support?
- What can history tell us about all groups' go-to tactics?
- Through what channels do these groups communicate their point of view and plans to act?
- What systems does our company have in place for monitoring social and traditional media?
- Who gets alerts, and when, about conversations relative to our site, project or industry?



GET GOOD INFORMATION OUT AHEAD OF MISINFORMATION

After taking inventory of the risks, preventative and response capabilities, and the nature and tactics of your opposition groups, turn to developing your story. Knowing

the project inside and out, the impacted communities and the invested opposition groups will help you drill down on the most favorable way to talk about the site or project in hopes of minimizing or even eliminating opposition. Address:

- Why it exists or is being built.
- What public good it will deliver (in terms of services, economic growth or tax revenue).
- When it will be operational.
- What safety measures are being put in place to protect the environment, community, water supply, etc.

With the overarching narrative locked in, more detailed questions will arise and need to be addressed before getting out in the community to tell your story in advance of detractors. Plan to have a living, breathing FAQ document so that you can be nimble in response when challenges arise. Open dialogue and transparency pay dividends with community members who will perceive the operator more favorably based on their willingness to engage in a conversation on all project risks.

CONNECT WITH SUPPORTERS

Identify individuals and groups likely to have your back. Rank them in terms of level of influence. Have one-on-one meetings with influential elected officials, stakeholders, business owners and individuals. In those meetings, be transparent about the projects' risks, as well as benefits. Have a discussion on potential pushback, and get local community leaders' feedback on how best to navigate it. Ask these leaders of the community to host meetings with larger groups of citizens. Build a coalition of support before engaging in more broad community meetings.

By engaging the community or communities most likely to be impacted by the infrastructure, you're demonstrating respect for them, good intentions, transparency and honesty. It's part of positioning the company to earn the trust and support of community members so that, if hard times come, you have someone to speak positively on your behalf.

EVOLVING TACTICS OF OPPOSITION GROUPS

Activists today have well-developed coalitions, communications channels and playbooks for shutting down production sites, supply chains, power plants,

pipelines—and now, even renewable energy developments. The old tactics are still there. Protestors still arrive at informational meetings, uninvited, chanting and making impassioned and disruptive pleas and chain themselves to equipment or lodge themselves within a pipeline. But they've added some new tactics to the playbook, too.

Activists now not only direct their ire at the company developing the project, but also the banks, insurers, subcontractors, government officials and others who provide funding, approvals and play any role in the project. Employees wearing company logo apparel or driving company trucks are subject to harassment out in public. Increasingly often, opposition groups conduct demonstrations and make demands on the front lawns of executives' homes, in restaurants, at third-party events and more.

Finally, and most powerfully, the intersectional alliance of social causes has fused groups together to build strength in numbers rallying against infrastructure projects, making developing and protecting critical infrastructure more challenging than ever. Intersectional organizing creates solidarity across what once seemed to be disparate causes, creating more conflict, a wider range of social issue challenges, greater numbers of protestors and more complex security challenges.

RESPONDING

When it comes to infrastructure security, using local security resources pays dividends. Residents inclined to protest see a neighbor and that sends a strong, tension-diffusing signal. Also, local police officers know the community, including the good and bad actors. They have ears and eyes trained on what's happening on the ground and can help create the most effective response that leans heavily into de-escalation to prevent an incident from escalating to a crisis.

More aggressive, wide-reaching tactics employed today by opposition groups are challenging corporate security...stretching teams to be in more places, maintaining robust security details well beyond company-owned locations. Many large enterprises are turning to off-duty officers for security "bench strength"—without the commitment of a full-time hire—to supplement security teams, provide a local presence and ensure the infrastructure site and community surrounding it are safe from harm. Managed services providers like Summit Off Duty Services help bring local officers on board and coordinate their support, making it easy for infrastructure developers and operators to have a local presence to protect their ability to operate.