



**CLARITY AND SAFETY:
COMMUNICATING ABOUT
UNDERGROUND ACTION**
2013 MEMBERS' CONFERENCE



INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the single most important aspect of our work as aboveground organizers and activists is to promote and normalize militant, underground resistance against industrial civilization. There is a lot of other important work that we do as well—organizing alternative institutions, landbase restoration, and aboveground political work to dismantle dominant power structures—but ultimately, civilization won't be stopped (and we won't be successful) without coordinated and strategic underground action. Working to promote and normalize militancy is incredibly important for aboveground individuals and organizations, because it prepares and tends the soil from which such action will spring. Without this support—a culture of resistance that embraces, celebrates, and promotes underground action—it is much more difficult for underground groups and networks to become established and be effective.

While this is a foremost priority for us, it can also be one of the most difficult parts of our work. Publicly speaking out in support of militancy and a diversity of tactics can be very scary, for entirely valid reasons. There is the fear that it will invite backlash and condemnation from those loyal to the status quo, as well as the fear that it will alienate us from friends and family, and perhaps most daunting of all, there is the fear that those in power will arrest and throw us in jail. Again, these are all perfectly valid fears, and ones that individuals should confront before deciding what they are and aren't comfortable doing as part of a resistance movement.

That said, there is an array of things we can do and steps we can take to minimize those risks and navigate them more securely. The first thing to do is to familiarize yourself with good security culture practices and fully internalize those behavior patterns until they become automatic. For more on security culture, see "Aboveground Security: How to Be Safer and Effective."

In addition to security culture, there are specific ways of talking about underground action that can help to minimize security risk and make your message more appealing and accessible for your audience. What follows are some basic "dos" and "don'ts" that we have learned from our experience speaking and communicating about militant resistance, as well as an overview of several com-

global economy will continue to kill humans and non-humans around the world—we just won't see them. In effect, we in the industrialized world live behind a military barricade, and we're only afforded the affluence we have by the forceful theft and exploitation of others. Dismantling civilization means that those millions of people who have been forced from their land will be able to return to sustainable ways of life.

The unfortunate truth is that we've overshot the carrying capacity of the earth. Without fossil fuels, there isn't any way to feed seven billion people. There's no way around it; human population must be dramatically reduced—and if we don't do it ourselves, it will happen when the fossil fuels run out and mass famine ensues. But that population decline doesn't have to be violent or full of suffering; we can take control of the situation and reduce our numbers in ways that promote justice, democracy, and sustainability in the space of a few generations. This work is very important, and is part of what and aboveground needs to do as a part of dismantling civilization.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Publicly calling for militant action to dismantle industrial civilization is not easy. It means taking an unpopular position, and saying things that most people don't want to hear. Preparation and practice is helpful, but the only way to truly get better at it is through experience. It may be scary, and you will likely make mistakes, but that's how we learn and grow, and it's how we become more effective.

Talking openly about the need for underground resistance is one of the most important things we can do as an aboveground movement. By doing so, we are working to build a culture of resistance that can actually succeed in stopping the destruction of the whole living world, and we nurture the soil from which the seeds of militant resistance will later spring.

ravels the state will become more authoritarian to ensure it controls the population and the remaining resources.

But what is the legacy that we want to leave for those who come after? How do you want to be seen by the generations that follow? Do you want to be seen as someone who knew what the right thing was and didn't do it because you were afraid? Or do you want to be remembered as someone who was afraid and did the right things anyway? It's okay to be afraid. There is tremendous joy and exhilaration that comes, too, from doing what is right. The fact that those in power will use their power against resisters is not a reason to give up the fight before we even begin. It is a reason to be really, really smart.

3. DGR wants to bring down civilization but what does it offer to replace it? Won't this strategy result in hungry people killing every last wild animal in the area for food and cutting down every last tree for fuel?

DGR believes that if industrial civilization is not brought down as soon as possible, there will not be a biosphere left for most living beings to survive in. So in that sense, anything that comes after industrial civilization is better than allowing the continued dismemberment of the planet.

Additionally, we need to create alternative institutions to those of the industrial civilization, and to build localized, sustainable democratic communities. This aboveground work needs to happen as fast as possible, everywhere at once, and it will help prevent more destruction and authoritarianism following civilization's collapse. Ultimately, we can't know what will happen after civilization comes down. But we do know that if we don't dismantle industrial civilization, there will be nothing left in a few generations. The only other option is to resist in the hope that we can stop runaway climate change so there is something left for those that come after us.

4. If we dismantle civilization, won't that kill millions of people? What about them?

Millions of people are already dying because of civilization, they just aren't our neighbors; they are over half a million children in the Global South die every year due to debt repayments to industrialized countries, and fully 40% of all human deaths are caused by environmental pollution. And don't forget that every day, civilization drives 200 species extinct. If we do nothing, the

only asked questions on the subject and ways to answer them.

DON'TS

While there are a multitude of ways to talk about underground resistance and effectively appeal to people, there are also some techniques and styles that should definitely be avoided, both for reasons of safety and appeal.

Some things to be avoided for the security risk they create include: how to's; specific targets; giving instructions or advice regarding illegal activity; using definite articles when talking about underground resistance ("the underground"); and talking about cooperation or coordination with an underground. We'll examine each of these more closely.

- **How to's:** Never give specific "how to" information about underground activity, about how to start or get involved in underground activity, or about tactics (e.g. how to make incendiary devices). Providing this sort of information is incredibly dangerous, regardless of what the audience does with it, and is not appropriate for aboveground activists.
- **Specific targets:** It is always a bad idea to discuss specific targets or dates when talking about militant resistance. Even if you aren't telling anyone to do anything or are speaking entirely hypothetically, talking about underground action in relation to a specific target is still dangerous. Instead, use vague or more generalized terms that don't indicate any particular location or target. Additionally, it is generally much safer to talk about particular infrastructure and targets if they're outside of the country where you live and halfway around the world.
- **Instructions and advice:** Giving direct advice or instructions about any illegal activity is always a bad and unsafe idea. If someone approaches you asking for advice or guidance in undertaking illegal or underground action—make clear that you are aboveground and won't answer or address any such questions. If you need to, end the conversation and walk away, or if you're speaking

in public, move on to another question.

- **“The underground”:** Don’t use definite articles when talking about underground resistance; rather than saying “the underground” say “an underground” or “any underground.” This seems like a nitpicky point, but it is important because saying “the underground” implies knowledge of an underground movement or organization, whereas using the indefinite “an underground” or “any underground” do not. You may know that you’re not trying to suggest you have knowledge of underground groups or individuals, but your audience will not, and they may walk away thinking you and/or DGR are connected to an underground resistance. As a further precaution, you can use the phrase “any underground that exists or may come to exist.”

- **Cooperating with an underground:** Don’t talk about “coordinating” or “cooperating” with an underground. This is another semantic detail that can have serious repercussions. The DGR strategy calls for both aboveground and underground parts of a movement, and it recognizes that these two different parts will have to support one another indirectly. But indirect support is very different from “cooperating” and “coordinating,” and using those terms often leads people to believe that you’re saying aboveground and underground folks should work together. To get the point across, it’s also helpful to explain further that “indirect support” means aboveground groups support sabotage when it occurs or that they speak out about the need for such action, not that aboveground and underground groups work directly together or in partnership.

Additionally, there are several other ways to talking about underground resistance that are best to avoid, because they don’t effectively convey the message and may tend to alienate people. While you should always craft your message in a way that will appeal to the particular nature of your audience, there are some narratives that should be avoided.

- **Vague violence and civic unrest:** Avoid talking about underground resistance in terms of vague violence and civic unrest. Militancy is a sensitive topic, and we need to be clear about what we are and are not proposing: we are proposing strategic sabotage against industrial infrastructure; not rioting, random arson and window smashing, or pitched battles with the police.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Besides strategies to speak effectively about underground action, as well as ways of speaking to avoid, there are other factors that often make public speaking in defense of militant resistance difficult or intimidating. In particular, knowing how to respond to challenging questions on the topic in a ways that are safe and convey the proper message is often a stumbling block. Below are four such questions, followed by sample answers that are in line with the DGR position.

1. If we use violence won’t people end up getting hurt or killed? That’s terrorism, right?

Civilization is based on violence; the violence of genocide against indigenous cultures, of agriculture against soil, of men against women, of the rich against the poor, of logging against forests, of mining against mountains, of dams against rivers, of the global economy against the rest of the living world. Any effort to dismantle civilization is an effort to end that violence.

Additionally, what we’re proposing isn’t violence against any living creatures—that’s what we want to stop—but violence against key nodes of infrastructure; violence against property, which is vastly different from violence against living persons. Those who use strategic sabotage against industrial infrastructure are no more terrorists than those who participated in the Boston Tea Party.

Terrorism is the use of physical coercion, primarily against non-combatants, especially civilians, to create fear in order to achieve various political aims. DGR does not advocate that any group should act in this way; the goal of attacks on infrastructure is to bring a halt to the violence of civilization. We recognize that some people may get hurt or killed indirectly from underground actions against industrial infrastructure, but millions of people are dying around the world each day because of this culture. These numbers will only increase as industrial civilization unravels. We cannot put a few extremely privileged people ahead of the majority of living beings and the earth.

2. If we act effectively against those in power, won’t those in power just come down on us harder?

Yes; the more effect a resistance movement is, the more force the government will use to squash it. As industrial civilization un-

ture, it is something that needs to be brought up again and again in a broad and general way.

- **Refer to real-world examples and historic struggles that used militant tactics:** We have found that talking theoretically about the possibility of underground resistance becomes much more tangible to people when talked about in terms of real-world and historical examples of successful underground resistance. It is a very good idea to learn about multiple struggles that have utilized strategic underground action (especially if the struggles are asymmetric) so you will be able to back up the claim that underground actions can be successful. Your goal here is to make underground work seem real and doable.

- **Emphasize that even if we don't choose to use UG tactics, we should support those who do, and at least not condemn them:** This is very important. Again, supporting an underground is one of the main purposes of an aboveground part of a resistance movement. Fortunately (and it's good to mention this), there is a lot of work to be done in the aboveground realm to cultivate a culture of resistance. There is a need for propaganda calling for underground resistance, for growing food to support resisters, for prisoner support and legal defense for resisters, and so on. The good news to give people is that, whatever your gifts or talents might be, there's a good chance they could be put into service building a culture of resistance which can support underground resistance. At the very least, even if they disagree with militant resistance, members of the aboveground should not condemn those who work underground.

- **Emphasize the AG/UG distinction:** Make sure it is clear to the people you are talking to that there is a definite distinction between the aboveground and an underground, and definitely make sure it is clear that there should be a firewall between those two parts of the movement. This can be confusing to people who are new to this kind of talk, so it's better to be clear and go over it and over it than to skim over it and assume people get what you're talking about.

- **“Holier-than-thou”:** When speaking about underground action, it's easy to slip into a “holier-than-thou” tone, wherein the most aggressive and militant stance is the most righteous. This can be very off-putting to an audience and rather than garnering support, it only serves to alienate people. Talking about militancy can be scary and difficult for people; we want to be understanding and meet them where they are, rather than scorning anyone for being hesitant about underground resistance.

- **Militancy as machismo:** Similar to the previous point, it doesn't take much for militant advocacy to become masculine posturing and chest-pounding. As a movement dedicated to dismantling patriarchy, this machismo needs to be named and confronted. It has no place in our movement.

- **Means over ends:** Because of the sensitive nature of discussion around militancy, it's easy to get bogged down talking about particular tactics and situations to the point that we lose sight of the end goal. While we need to be fostering discussion about underground tactics and action, it's important to do so within the larger picture of why we need those things. Our argument is that the ends justify the means, it's just as important (if not more so) to talk about those ends, rather than confining conversation to only the means we'll use to get there.

Another thing to remember is that alcohol and drugs don't mix well with sensitive political work. As the previous lists should attest, talking about underground resistance can be unsafe if we're not careful. Doing so while intoxicated or under the influence is a bad idea; inhibited mental judgment and an unclear mind can put yourself and your comrades in danger with a few poorly chosen words.

DOS

While there are certain things in particular that should be avoided when speaking publicly to promote underground resistance, good ways of communicating about the subject are much less specific.

However, there are still general guidelines to keep in mind and strategies to most clearly and effectively convey your message without alienating people or endangering yourself or others.

These include: vocally supporting the need for underground action; speaking carefully and deliberately; ending conversations that become unsafe; being explicit about security culture; emphasizing strategic underground action; referring to real world examples of militant resistance movements; emphasizing the importance of supporting those who do take militant action; and emphasizing the aboveground-underground firewall.

- **Vocally support the need for UG action:** This is one of our primary tasks as members of DGR, and perhaps the most important. As people working in the aboveground realm of resistance, promoting and normalizing an activist culture that is supportive of underground action is paramount if our goals as an organization are to be met. Specifically, this means building a culture of resistance in which loyalty and material support for frontline resisters is cultivated and nurtured. Being vocally supportive about underground action can take many forms, and it is up to each of us to determine what is best to say given certain audiences and bodies of law that differ country to country. Be sure to research your home country/state law regarding what is okay or not okay to say in public!

- **Speak carefully and deliberately:** Because talking about the need for an underground is a sensitive and important issue, care should be taken to not gloss over it during a presentation. If you're to pick one part of your presentation in which you speak more slowly and deliberately than any other time, make it be the part about underground action. This will ensure more people will understand what you're talking about and impress upon them that what you're saying is important and should be listened to.

- **Cut people off or end the conversation if they go too far:** We can't always be sure that the people we're talking to about underground work have gone through basic security culture training or have any knowledge of the usefulness of firewalls between aboveground and underground parts of a movement. Given this, it is likely that someone, at some point, will start talking to you about underground action in a way that violates security culture and turns what was previously a safer situation into a riskier one

(see "DON'Ts" section above). For the sake of both aboveground and underground organizers, it is imperative that you know how to cut off a conversation if it begins to take a path towards or past a security culture breach. If someone starts talking about specific targets for militant, underground action, for example, or if they start talking to you about their own personal interest in going underground, you should be prepared to end the conversation abruptly and definitively. For those of us in the United States, we've had lawyers tell us the exact wording we should use in this type of situation: "We are an aboveground movement. We don't want to be involved. We do not answer questions about anyone's personal desire to be in or form an underground.' At that point, you can direct them to the security page on the DGR website. You do NOT want to say something like, "We don't want to know," or anything that will give the impression of a hint-hint, wink-wink kind of thing. Say, "We don't want to be involved."

- **Explicitly state security culture guidelines:** Whenever you talk about the need for underground action, you should most always follow up with an explicit statement about security culture and maintaining a strict firewall between aboveground and underground organizing. Make it clear that, while knowing security culture and practicing good security culture can't guarantee our safety, it can definitely help us be safer in our activism. Really, you can never go over security culture enough, especially given that those in power can change the laws on us at any time. It's always a good idea to stay fluent in security culture and to teach those around you.

- **Emphasize strategic sabotage against infrastructure:** What makes DGR's strategy different from others is that we not only recognize the need for underground action against the industrial economy, but we recognize the need for strategic and decisive actions against critical nodes of industrial infrastructure. This is an important thing to say because it is the essence of why we think we can be successful in our struggle to save the planet, and it also separates us from other machismo-infested "radical" groups that promote militancy and violence simply for the sake of militancy and violence. Emphasize that any underground action done in defense of the earth must be strategic and intelligent. Keeping in mind that you should never talk about specifics or "how-to's" when bringing up the need for strategic targeting of infrastruc-