



## **SAFETY BEST PRACTICES FOR PROTESTS**

### **CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

- This information is based on the experience and observations of a trained first responder who is focused on your safety; please consider these practices and tips in the context of your own experience and observations.
- “Failing to plan is planning to fail”, is a phrase from the world of emergency preparedness.
- The vast majority of protests are peaceful, but remember that protests can get chaotic and spiral out of control very quickly and without warning.
- Remember COVID during your activities.

### **PLAN AHEAD**

- Plan your activities with a “buddy” or a small team who knows you are there, you know they are there, and you have each other’s cell phone numbers; teams of three people are better than teams of two
- Take the time for a pre-incident briefing with your buddy or team:
  - Don’t assume everyone in the group knows the same things or is on the same page. Go over everything together.
  - Discuss what you know of the current environment, including the different types of protestors who may be there, as well as the different types of police (local police, National Guard, federal officers, etc.).
  - Discuss your physical activities, where you will all be, what the location is like.
  - Consider whether you are going into an area that you are familiar with versus when you are going to somewhere unfamiliar.
  - Discuss what you have seen as pre-indicators of future violence.
  - Discuss what you will do if you are separated, cannot find one another, someone ceases to answer their cell phone when called; and when and where you will reunite.
  - Discuss what you will do if one of you is tear-gassed, injured, or arrested.
  - Take a photo of yourself and what you are wearing; send it to someone who is not going with you but knows where you went, in case they need to describe your appearance later. Also tell them when to expect you to be back.
  - Have that person or someone else be available on the phone to receive or pass on messages from everyone in your group, in case you lose touch with each other at the event.
- Plan together for the unexpected.



## PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

- A saying from the world of first responders: “One is none; two is one” – you should carry a backup of important items in case they are lost or don’t work.
- Have important information like routes and phone numbers on paper as well as on your phone.
- Bring with you:
  - Two face masks, highly recommended to be KN95 or better, not just cloth
  - Swimming goggles is a good idea, to be able to see, if gas is used
  - Personal first aid kit in a zip lock bag for your pocket, with band aids, gauze, medical tape, etc.
  - A fully charged cell phone (and a backup phone charger/cable if you have one)
  - Load a map of the area easily visible on the phone; have a paper map too.
  - A small flashlight, or two, if there is any chance you will be there at night
  - Picture ID
  - In your car, keep bottles of water and milk, to rinse your skin and eyes if you are exposed to gasses such as tear gas.

## WHEN YOU ARE THERE

- Review a map of the area before you get out of your car.
- Mark the place on the map and take a photo of some landmark where your car is.
- Be situationally alert at all times—all 360 degrees—in front, to the side and behind you. Stop, look around, and listen. Be aware that tunnel vision can prevent awareness of a deteriorating situation.
- Pay attention to your own body sense of what is going on.
- Pay attention to the body language of the police; they have earpieces and hear things you cannot hear about what might happen next.
- Note that the police may suddenly move the line of officers forward, disperse the crowd or move into the crowd.
- All of you should be watchful, but in addition one of your team should be focused solely on watching out. Agree on a phrase like “It’s time to go,” and if that person says it, don’t take time to discuss why; just go.
- Think about how to safely disengage if someone is growing agitated at you.
- Recognize your limits in skills to intervene or to continue intervening.



## **WHEN YOU RETURN AFTERWARD**

- Share your experiences and what you may have learned with one another.
- Let your body decompress and calm down before you send messages that might inflame things.