



Activists planning to confront and disrupt during GOP convention

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NEW YORK -- Activists protesting the GOP convention are covertly making plans to hold sit-ins at delegate hotels, take over Manhattan intersections, block doors to major corporate offices, confront Republican big shots and infiltrate convention events.

As some protest groups tangle with city officials over permits for marches and rallies, others have been planning acts of nonviolent civil disobedience for months. They are expected to make their debut by swarming Times Square streets as thousands of Republicans arrive there for a glamorous evening of Broadway shows on the night before the convention begins.

A loose council of protesters will announce this week a call for mass civil disobedience on Tuesday, Aug. 31 _ the second day of the convention. Activists are expected to target Republican events throughout the day with bursts of civil disobedience like sit-ins and street theater, beginning with a GOP breakfast at Tavern on the Green and culminating with a convergence in the streets around the convention that evening.

The Manhattan district attorney has said he expects 1,000 arrests per day throughout the four-day convention _ three times the normal daily arrest volume _ and these unpermitted protesters are likely to make up the majority.

They say the aim is not to cause harm or even stop the convention from proceeding inside Madison Square Garden. They will use what they call creative mischief to call attention to their disgust with the Bush administration.

"It sends that message loud and clear, that people feel so strongly that they are willing to put their freedom and their bodies on the line," said Cindy Rosin, an activist involved with the effort.

The actions also protest the city's permit process itself, which critics say unfairly herds crowds away from the convention. After new terrorism warnings were announced Sunday, Mayor Michael Bloomberg said protest permits will help police officials focus the deployment of officers and better control the location and flow of large crowds.

Police say those who block traffic or pose other hazards during the convention could face arrests on disorderly conduct and other misdemeanor charges.

A vertical sidebar with a blue border and a light blue background. At the top, it says "Specials from Newsday's Advertisers" in yellow and blue text. Below this, there is a list of advertiser names in blue text, each on a separate line with a thin horizontal line underneath. The names are: Grover Home Headquarters, Bavarian Inn, Jumble, La Pergola di Taormina, Giovanni Rosso, and Master Spas and Leisure.

"We're prepared to accommodate peaceful demonstrations," said the NYPD's chief spokesman, Paul Browne. "We're also prepared to deal with anyone who breaks the law."

Demonstrators say they plan to offer an alternative to the Republicans' official program.

"Inside the convention, there's a monologue," activist Tim Doody said, "a dog and pony show that runs on the fuel of corporate dollars and not on people's interests, and we want to show the majority of people whose beliefs aren't being represented inside Madison Square Garden."

They plan to create zones around the Garden, with a site for a mass sit-in and areas for street theater. Organizers also want a festive area, where activists make art, music, food and "create the kind of world they want to see," Doody said.

"It's a matter of showing the world that we're not just against things, that we're for a whole lot," Rosin said.

But their discontent _ with everything from the Iraq war to the president's desire to ban gay marriage _ is more likely to be the emphasis. These activists, many of whom are veteran protesters championing an array of causes, want to seize the rare chance to communicate their anti-Bush message through the world media in town for the convention.

They are mindful, though, of the perception that activists are violent, mask-wearing, flag burners out to destroy property _ an image driven by events like the Seattle 1999 World Trade Organization meeting, where demonstrators clashed with police, leading to millions of dollars in damage.

Organizers advise protesters not to wear masks, which are illegal at New York City protests, and to find alternatives to all-black clothing. Khaki is less intimidating, one group suggests. It will also let them blend in.

"They won't know who to arrest or pepper-spray just by looking. Plus, the crowd will look much more like the average American instead of a marginalized gang of malcontents _ not that there's anything wrong with that," they cheer on a Web site.

It's not known how many activists are planning civil disobedience, but recent meetings in Brooklyn have drawn nearly 200 people, some of whom represent entire groups.

Protesters are also learning their legal rights, first aid and how to carry out safe and creative civil disobedience.

Among other operations, they plan to hold sit-ins or block entrances to offices at companies they call "war profiteers," including a major defense contractor, a sport utility vehicle dealership and an investment firm with Bush family ties and big defense industry holdings.

Also that day, the War Resister's League is planning a solemn march from the World Trade Center site to the convention, where they will play dead on the street to "graphically illustrate all those who have been killed by the government's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq," the group says.

The march comes two days after a massive permitted anti-war rally along Manhattan's West Side.

"The war and what the administration is doing is so outrageous and objectionable," organizer Ed Hedemann said, "that we feel a more dramatic statement is necessary."