



# TIMELY INFORMATION

## Agriculture & Natural Resources

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Department of Poultry Science, Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5641

### **Ecoterrorism: Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **What is ecoterrorism?**

Ecoterrorism involves acts or threatened acts of violence against individuals or property to prevent or to protest harm against animals or the environment.

The FBI's Domestic Terrorism Section defines ecoterrorism as "the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally oriented, subnational group for environmental-political reasons or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature."

Ron Arnold, executive vice president of the Center for Defense of Free Enterprise and author of "Ecoterror: The Violent Agenda to Save Nature," is generally credited with developing the term.

#### **How prevalent is ecoterrorism in the United States?**

The FBI now considers ecoterrorism as the No. 1 domestic terrorism threat in the United States, exceeding that of "right-wing extremists, Ku Klux Klan, antiabortion groups and the like," according to testimony presented before the U.S. Senate. The FBI estimates that since 1976, more than 1,100 ecoterrorist-related crimes have been committed in the United States, resulting in some \$110 million in economic losses.

The growing threat associated with environmental extremism was underscored by the January 2006 federal court indictments of 11 people charged with committing acts of domestic terrorism. The indictments listed 65 charges, including arson, sabotage and conspiracy in attacks against public and private facilities between 1996 and 2001. This included a 1997 torching of a Redmond horse slaughterhouse and a 2001 act of arson at the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture. Other targets included research labs, ranger stations, lumber companies, a high-tension power line, and a ski area.

#### **How does ecoterrorism differ from other forms of domestic terrorism?**

The FBI distinguishes ecoterrorism from other radical domestic groups because of its heavy emphasis on specific issues rather than a broad-based political agenda --- the reason ecoterrorism is commonly described as "special-interest extremism." More recently, however, law enforcement authorities and others monitoring extremist groups have noted a shift toward a broader agenda.

## **How violent is the ecoterrorist movement in the United States?**

Inspired by Edward Abbey's 1975 novel, "The Monkey Wrench Gang," radical animal rights and environmental activists initially employed comparatively benign forms of activism, such as vandalizing logging trucks and "liberating" laboratory test animals.

Indeed, until recently, ecoterrorism has been more prevalent and violent in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom, where biotech executives and scientists who employ laboratory animals have even been physically assaulted.

Even so, federal law enforcement officials have noted a steady progression from so-called monkey-wrenching tactics to more violent acts of property destruction. These acts have ranged from firebombing and plotting to blow up public dams to harassment and threats of outright violence against people associated with practices considered destructive to animals or to the environment in general --- harassment that, in some cases, has even been targeted against their family members.

In 2005, for example, the wife of one pharmaceutical company executive was singled out for severe harassment, including credit card theft and accusations of "puppy killer," which not only were spray-painted onto the couple's house but posted on the Internet along with their home phone, license plate and bank account numbers.

## **Aren't the FBI's public statements about ecoterrorism's threat to people somewhat overblown?**

A number of experts outside of the FBI also have commented on the changes within the radical environmental fringe since the Sept. 11 attacks as well as the possibility that these changes could spark more violent acts. For example, in a Nov. 16, 2003 *New York Times* article, Gary A. Ackerman, senior research associate at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, Calif., raised concerns that the environmental extremists' view of "humans as no more important than animals or the environment leaves open the possibility of making bigger statements."

"They're not the devil incarnate, but they're not benign either," Ackerman said.

Moreover, some spokespersons associated with environmental radicalism have refused to renounce physical violence. A Dec. 12, 2005 article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, for example, carried statements by Jerry Vlasak, a California physician and North American Animal Liberation Press Office spokesman vocally opposed to the use of animals in medical research. Vlasak, speaking before a U.S. Congressional hearing, endorsed "any means necessary" to prevent harm to animals and did not rule out homicide.

An Earth Liberation Front communiqué claiming credit for a September 2002 firebombing of a U.S. Forest Service research station in Pennsylvania declared: "While innocent life will never be harmed in any action we undertake, where it is necessary, we will no longer hesitate to pick up the gun to implement justice, and provide the needed protection for our planet that decades of legal battles, pleading, protest and economic sabotage have failed...to achieve."

## **Hasn't there been some public criticism of federal efforts to brand these groups as terrorists?**

The use of the term ecoterrorist by the FBI and other federal law enforcement and security agencies is not without controversy.

Some civil libertarians have raised concerns that the term ultimately could be construed by federal law enforcement authorities to encompass nonviolent acts that, while annoying or even disruptive, do not result in property damage or physical harm.

Similar views have been expressed by *Seattle Weekly* columnist Geov Parrish, who characterizes environmental radicals as "idealistic fools" but not terrorists.

Fanaticism has led these radicals to commit foolish, destructive acts, Parrish contends, but acts that "didn't physically injure anyone, didn't truly 'terrorize' anyone." For these reasons, he argues, they shouldn't be branded as domestic terrorism or ecoterrorists --- nor, for that matter, "left to rot in some jail" or sent to an "offshore gulag" for acts of arson no different than that "motivated by insurance scam, revenge or pyromania."

Other critics have suggested ecosabotage as a more apt term for most forms of direct action associated with radical environmentalism, because these actions are almost invariably targeted against inanimate things --- property or machines, for example --- rather than against people.

## **What are some of the other disturbing changes in environmentalism noted by federal law enforcement officials?**

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, officials have noted the increasingly violent, anti-American rhetoric that has characterized the public statements of many radical animal rights and environmentalist groups, especially since the Sept. 11 attacks, with some groups even claiming the attacks were justified.

There also appears to be a blurring of vision among some of these groups. Once focused exclusively on protecting animals and the environment from the perceived ill effects of capitalism, some radical environmentalist groups appear to have expanded their political agenda, embracing other extremist causes, and, in some cases, expressing solidarity with radical Islamism, particularly with its views on defeating the United States.

Radical environmentalist groups associated with ecoterrorism also appear to be better financed than ever before.

## **Who is financing ecoterrorism?**

Some radical animal rights and environmentalist cells, borrowing a page from the Irish Republican Army, have begun forging ties with other extremist groups with steadier sources of funding.

In the view of federal law enforcement officials, one particularly troubling development has been the growing ties between these radical groups and Central and South American liberationist organizations, some of which are funded through the narcotics trade and are known to maintain links with al Qaeda-affiliated cells.

These links, they contend, raise all sorts of horrifying implications. For example, in return for funding, U.S. ecoterrorist groups could help al Qaeda-affiliated cells smuggle people and weapons across the nation's porous borders to commit future terrorist acts.

### **What groups are behind ecoterrorism?**

Ecoterrorism within the United States has generally been associated with three groups, the Animal Liberation Front, the Earth Liberation Front, and, to a more limited extent, Earth First!, though more radical splinter groups have emerged since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Formally established in 1976 in the United Kingdom, the Animal Liberation Front is a highly decentralized group with roots extending back to the Bands of Mercy, a 19<sup>th</sup> century British activist group sternly opposed to fox hunting. The first ALF cell in the United States was believed to have been established in 1982. ALF was formally declared a terrorist threat by the Department of Homeland Security in January 2005.

The Earth Liberation Front, a highly decentralized group much like ALF, undertakes direct action, usually in the form of economic sabotage, to safeguard the environment. Organized in Brighton, England, in 1992, ELF is a spinoff of Earth First!, a somewhat less strident group. So far, ELF's actions in the United States have largely been limited to vandalism and arson. Its Web site has featured a 37-page manual titled "Setting Fires with Electrical Timers."

Both ALF and ELF remain highly decentralized and operate largely through cells.

Earth First! has also been linked with ecoterrorism, though its tactics have tended to focus more on nonviolent techniques, such as sit-ins and mild forms of monkey wrenching to prevent logging, dam building and other forms of development. However, in more recent years, Earth First!er's have gravitated toward political anarchism and, much like ALF and ELF, a more decentralized organizational structure.

### **Radical movements generally tend to be highly fractious, often spinning off groups with even stronger agendas. Is this the case with radical environmentalism?**

Yes, radical environmentalism has turned out to be no exception. One example is Arissa Media Group, an organization founded by Craig Rosebraugh and Leslie Pickering, two activists who have served as spokesmen for ALF and ELF. In Rosebraugh's own words, Arissa's primary goal is to unleash a "social and political revolution" through acts ranging from "massive property destruction, to online sabotage, to physical occupation of buildings."

Rosebraugh also has openly called for the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. The cover of his self-published book, "The Logic of Political Violence," features a picture of the burning Twin Towers.

"It is time to start talking about a revolution in this country," Rosebraugh stated in one interview. "And yes, if there is a revolution, it will be violent. Name one revolution in history that was not violent."

### **What types of people are attracted to the ecoterrorist movement?**

People who are attracted to the ecoterrorism tend to be young, well-educated, primarily middle- and upper-middle-class males who support animal rights and environmental causes but who are nonetheless disillusioned with what they perceive as the lack of progress among mainstream groups. Law enforcement officials describe the nation's colleges and universities as breeding grounds for environmental radicalism.

A three-day seminar held at the California State University at Fresno in 2003, titled "Revolutionary Environmentalism: A Dialogue between Activists and Academics" generated an immense public outcry and press scrutiny, forcing the university to issue numerous assurances that it did not "endorse or condone" the use of violence to advance a pro-environmental agenda.

Even so, seminar organizer Mark Somma, a California State Fresno political science professor, claimed the seminar generated a lot of interest among students virulently opposed to the Patriot Act, current federal environmental policies, and U.S. involvement in Iraq.

### **How is it that groups such as ALF and ELF, which remain highly decentralized and operate mainly through cells, manage to wreak so much havoc?**

The highly decentralized structure characterizing most radical animal rights and environmentalist groups is what causes many law enforcement officials the most concern.

Like other radical groups, ecoterrorists are learning how to use their small numbers to their advantage. In the mid-1960s, U.S. law enforcement officials were able to defeat the Ku Klux Klan, a large centralized group, by penetrating its ranks with FBI agents.

Ecoterrorists, however, have learned the value of operating clandestinely in small groups to elude detection. Adding to this advantage is their growing affinity for black-block techniques developed and perfected by underground Marxist movements in Italy and West Germany in the 1970s --- a strategy reflected in Rosebraugh's call to "strike again hard and fast and quickly retreat into anonymity."

In many cases, ecoterrorist acts are committed by three or four individuals who then attribute their actions to a particular movement, whether it is ALF, ELF or some smaller splinter group. To avoid detection, ecoterrorists also tend to adhere to strict security measures when communicating among themselves. They also tend to be well-informed about the law and the limits of law enforcement.

## **How much encouragement do radical environmentalists receive from mainstream environmental groups?**

One comparatively mainstream group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, has lent rhetorical and financial support to violent groups, such as ALF and ELF.

An example of this type of support can be found in the frequently asked questions section of PETA's Web site, where it defends ALF-sponsored acts of property damage as contemporary examples of how people throughout history have acted unlawfully to "answer to a higher morality."

Moreover, Ingrid Newkirk, PETA founder and president, has stated that she "would be the last person to condemn ALF." She also has publicly acknowledged her frequent efforts to publicize ALF-related actions.

The Center for Consumer Freedom also has accused Newkirk of possibly possessing advanced knowledge of an ALF-associated action.

In addition, the Heartland Institute has reported that PETA provided grants and loans totaling \$70,990 to support the legal efforts of Rodney Coronado, a self-described ALF member who served 57 months in federal prison for a 1990s arson attack that destroyed a research facility at Michigan State University. U.S. Attorney Michael Dettmer (in a sentencing memo associated with Coronado's trial) contends that Newkirk arranged for Coronado to send her stolen documents and a videotape of the MSU arson days before the attack occurred.

(On Feb. 22, 2006, Coronado was arrested again by federal agents for allegedly teaching a room full of activists at an August 2003 "revolution summer" event in San Diego how to make an incendiary device out of common household materials.)

## **So what if ecoterrorism has become violent in recent years? Aren't we still talking about isolated incidents posing little risk to the country as a whole?**

Not necessarily. If the Sept. 11 attacks drove one point home to law enforcement authorities and terrorism experts, it is the fact that even technologically unsophisticated actions can produce widespread and lasting damage to our infrastructure and economic stability.

One sector of the U.S. economy that appears especially vulnerable to attack is the farming sector. Terrorism experts, for example, have depicted a frightening scenario in which radical environmentalists, working with al Qaeda-affiliated cells, could undertake a series of debilitating attacks on the U.S. farm economy. Documents obtained from al Qaeda hideouts in Afghanistan openly explore the possibility of introducing microbes and poisons into livestock and other farming operations with the aim of crippling the \$201 billion U.S. farming economy. Likewise, some radical environmentalists who equate livestock farming with animal cruelty nonetheless advocate similar attacks as the most effective way to impede livestock farming.

Even comparatively simple attacks on livestock farming could result in devastating consequences. An introduction of foot-and-mouth disease, for example, could lead to the slaughter of millions of U.S. cattle and result in a worldwide ban on U.S. beef exports for years.

### **What is being done to prevent this?**

Until the Sept. 11 tragedy, the U.S. government was slow to react to this and similar threats. However, this is changing. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is developing a rapid response network that will operate in the event of such an attack. This network and similar efforts are part of an ambitious USDA plan to safeguard the nation's farms against potentially devastating terrorist attacks.

### **Why would people working to stop “violence” against animals perpetrate attacks against them --- such as a biological attack on livestock farming?**

It is based on the reasoning that the death of some animals through the introduction of diseases or pathogens could save many more in the long term --- in other words, an acceptable cost of war.

**Written and compiled by Jim Langcuster, Extension News and Public Affairs specialist, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, in cooperation with Dr. Robert A. Norton, professor of veterinary bacteriology and biosecurity, Auburn University Department of Poultry Science.**