

Extinction Rebellion could sue police over extremist ideology listing

Group threatens action after being named in guide designed to help prevent terrorism

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Counter-terrorism police placed XR on a list of extremist ideologies that should be reported to the authorities running the Prevent programme. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Extinction Rebellion is threatening legal action against counter-terrorism police for what it said was the illegal listing of the group as an extremist ideology in a guide designed to help stop terrorist violence.

The Guardian revealed on Friday that counter-terrorism police had **placed the non-violent protest group** on a list of extremist ideologies that should be reported to the authorities running the **Prevent** anti-radicalisation programme. Police now say that was an error.

Amnesty International condemned the decision on Saturday as criticism grew and questions remained about how **Extinction Rebellion** (XR) came to be included in the guide alongside neo-Nazi and terrorist groups.

The climate emergency campaign group was included in a 12-page document produced by Counter Terrorism Policing South East (CTPSE) titled "Safeguarding young people and adults from ideological extremism".

XR has instructed lawyers.

Jules Carey, who acted for XR when it successfully struck down police protest bans in the courts last year, told the Guardian that the latest guidance was unlawful. "It is extraordinary that Counter Terrorism Policing South East have added Extinction Rebellion to the list of terrorist groups and extremist organisations that the **Prevent strategy** was set up to deal with.

"The guidance issued by the CTPSE is clearly unlawful. It constitutes an unlawful interference with human rights including free speech, right to assemble and enjoyment of a private life.

"The guidance is clearly designed to harm Extinction Rebellion and cast those who support the movement as domestic extremists. It is a glaring example of the sort of overzealous policing we have come to expect around protests. Being referred to Prevent could have long-lasting and life-changing consequences for a young school activist."

After inquiries by the Guardian police said they were recalling the guidance and that XR had been included in error in the guide, which was distributed to police, government and teachers in November 2019.

Carey, of Bindmans solicitors, said: "It is not sufficient that CTPSE have sought to recall the guide from those that they shared it with. The advice in the guide ... itself needs to be formally withdrawn and any decision taken to refer an activist of XR to Prevent needs to be urgently reversed."

Kerry Mosconi, Amnesty International UK's campaigns director, said the police guidance added to **longstanding concerns about Prevent**. "It's deeply shocking that the police ever seriously considered classifying peaceful climate crisis protesters as extremists. To see that schoolchildren were effectively going to be profiled under these proposed measures, just deepens our shock.

"Given that children are potentially those who will be most affected by the climate emergency, it's vital that they are able to speak

out on these issues without this heavy-handed and entirely disproportionate police attention. This episode only adds to our existing concerns about Prevent, which is a highly dubious scheme sorely in need of a proper, independent and impartial review.”

Prevent is the the government’s anti-radicalisation programme. It is intended to spot people at risk of becoming involved in terrorism and divert them away from extremism.

Concerns have been raised that it impinges on freedom of thought and speech. Its supporters, which include the government and the police, say it is vital to stop the flow of recruits to Islamist and extreme rightwing violence, but it has been accepted that **changes may be needed**.

A review of Prevent that is due to report later this year is expected to be delayed **after its original chair stepped** down following criticism and a legal challenge.

The police document revealed by the Guardian said that issues to look out for included people who speak in “strong or emotive terms about environmental issues like climate change, ecology, species extinction, fracking, airport expansion or pollution”.

The guide advises readers to listen and look out for young people who “neglect to attend school” or “participate in planned school walkouts” – an allusion to the school strikes for the climate, a global movement of which **the activist Greta Thunberg** is a lead proponent. Thousands of UK pupils and millions worldwide walked out of school last year in protest at government inaction on the climate crisis.

Terrorism police list Extinction Rebellion as extremist ideology

Exclusive: Police scramble to recall guide issued to teachers putting climate activists alongside far-right groups

Vikram Dodd and Jamie Grierson

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An Extinction Rebellion protest at the Australian embassy in London on Friday. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Counter-terrorism police placed the non-violent group **Extinction Rebellion** (XR) on a list of extremist ideologies that should be reported to the authorities running the Prevent programme, which aims to catch those at risk of committing atrocities, the Guardian has learned.

The climate emergency campaign group was included in a 12-page guide produced by counter-terrorism police in the south-east titled Safeguarding young people and adults from ideological extremism, which is marked as “official”.

XR featured alongside threats to national security such as neo-Nazi terrorism and a pro-terrorist Islamist group. The guide, aimed at police officers, government organisations and teachers who by law have to report concerns about radicalisation, was dated last November.

It says that issues to look out for include people who speak in “strong or emotive terms about environmental issues like climate change, ecology, species extinction, fracking, airport expansion or pollution”.

In the guide, people are advised to listen and look out for young people who “neglect to attend school” or “participate in planned school walkouts” – an allusion to the school strikes for the climate, a global movement of which **the activist Greta Thunberg** is a lead proponent. Thousands of UK pupils, and millions worldwide, walked out of school last year in protest at government inaction on the climate crisis.

The document also flags young people taking part in non-violent direct action, such as sit-down protests, banner drops or “writing environmentally themed graffiti”.

The disclosure that XR has been listed alongside proscribed groups such as National Action and Al-Muhajiroun is likely to be deeply embarrassing for counter-terror chiefs. They have for years faced claims that Prevent can cross the line to stifle legitimate free speech, thought and dissent.

Extinction Rebellion

OFFICIAL

What you might see and hear:

Who are they?
A campaign encouraging protest and civil disobedience to pressure governments to take action on climate change and species extinction.

Why are they a threat?
An anti-establishment philosophy that seeks system change underlies its activism; the group attracts to its events school-age children and adults unlikely to be aware of this. While non-violent against persons, the campaign encourages other law-breaking activities.

Group logo and propaganda materials.
The group produces freely downloadable leaflets, posters, placards, banners and stencils. You may see them, the group's logo (pictured left), or the phrases 'tell the truth', 'rise up' or 'rebel' among individuals' personal possessions, on electronic devices or on objects like buildings, lamp posts and school lockers. You may also encounter these symbols and phrases as graffiti on walls or drawn by pupils on bags or exercise books.

Participation in 'direct action' or training.
You may see or hear of young people taking part in 'NVDA' (non-violent direct action) such as sit-down protests, 'die-ins' (demonstrations in which protestors feign death), lock-ons (locking or gluing oneself to property), banner drops, blockading roads or writing environmentally-themed graffiti on roads or buildings. They may neglect to attend school in order to do so, or participate in planned school 'walk-outs'. You may also become aware of students having attended NVDA training sessions, at which they are taught 'the theory and practice of non-violent action.'

Desire to be arrested for acts of civil disobedience.
You may hear people express admiration for those arrested for protest activity or verbalise a desire to attract, divert or otherwise occupy police resources. You may encounter individuals who adopt the 'passively limp' posture recommended by Extinction Rebellion upon arrest (designed to require the efforts of more police officers thereby diverting resources from other protest activity).

Discussion of associated groups and issues.
You may hear expressions of support for associated activist groups like Compassionate Revolution and Rising Up! (logo pictured left), or see use of Extinction Rebellion's acronym 'XR'. You may also hear people speaking in strong or emotive terms about environmental issues like climate change, ecology, species extinction, fracking, airport expansion or pollution.

While concern about climate change is not in itself extreme, activists may encourage vulnerable people to perform acts of violence, or commit such acts themselves.

RISING UP!

When the Guardian first asked police about the document, officials said they would review the guidance to clarify their position on Extinction Rebellion. But following further questions, counter-terrorism police confirmed it had been circulated to “statutory partners” and had now been recalled. They said they now accepted that the protest group was not extremist.

The guide, bearing the counter-terrorism policing logo, urges those in “regular, direct contact with young people or members of the public” to look out for various warning signs and consider a referral to Prevent if they believe someone is falling prey to “ideological extremism”.

Setting out its purpose, the guide says: “This document is designed to help you recognise when young people or adults may be vulnerable to extreme or violent ideologies.

“Identification of any one of the signs presented here, in isolation, may not be indicative of vulnerability or radicalisation. However, in combination or in circumstances where they do not ‘fit’, they may indicate an individual at risk. In such cases, consider whether the individual is vulnerable to extremism and should be referred to the UK government’s Prevent programme.”

The guide runs through various extremist ideologies, and contains a whole page on XR.

Explaining why it is considered a threat, it states: “Anti-establishment philosophy that seeks system change underlies its activism; the group attracts to its events school-age children and adults unlikely to be aware of this. While non-violent against persons, the campaign encourages other law-breaking activities.”

It adds: “While concern about climate change is not in itself extreme, activists may encourage vulnerable people to perform acts

of violence, or commit such acts themselves.”

The Guardian understands that counter-terrorism officials at a national level believe including XR in the guide was a mistake and insist they do not view its ideology as extremist. They say any such advice was issued by Counter Terrorism Policing South East (CTPSE) in the south-east of England and not in any other part of the UK.

In its first statement, CTPSE said: “This document was produced at a local level to help our partners to spot the signs of vulnerability to radicalisation. By including Extinction Rebellion in this document, it gives the impression we consider them to be an extremist group, which they are not. We will review the guidance to make this clear.”

Later, after further inquiries from the Guardian, police said they would recall the document.