

Changes to legislation for policing protests

Published on 2 July 2023

The law has changed on how police should respond to protests and events

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- This article was updated on Wednesday 20 December 2023.

New legislation is coming into effect and the changes affect the policing of protests and events.

We are supporting forces, public order commanders and operational officers to understand and implement the changes in our supplementary guides (under further guidance).

Public order public safety (POPS) officers should understand all the new powers and offences when responding to protests and planned and unplanned events.

Changes from the Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations 2023

The [Public Order Act 1986 \(Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community\) Regulations 2023](#) amends the Public Order Act 1986 with regard to imposing conditions on protests considered to be causing 'serious disruption to the life of the community'.

Changes from the Public Order Act 2023

The [Public Order Act 2023](#) sets out a range of changes, including a definition of serious disruption and a range of new policing powers and offences. Examples include updated powers to stop and search and the following new offences.

- 'Locking-on' and 'going equipped to lock-on', where an individual attaches themselves to others, objects or buildings to cause serious disruption.
- 'Tunnelling' and 'being equipped for tunnelling', where an individual creates a tunnel beneath the ground with the intent to cause serious disruption.

- Obstructing major works on transport networks and interfering with key pieces of national infrastructure, such as transport and energy.

Changes from the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

The Public Order Act 2023 builds on measures that were introduced as part of the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act \(PCSCA\) 2022](#) on 28 June 2022.

The PCSCA 2022 sets out changes that aim to 'uphold the right to peaceful protest while providing the police with the necessary powers to stop disruptive protests from disproportionately infringing on the rights and freedoms of others'.

Changes from the PCSCA 2022 include:

- increasing the maximum prison sentence for criminal damage to memorials up to £5,000
- increasing sentences for protests that cause serious disruption to communities, individuals and organisations in the surrounding area, including those that bring roads and public transport networks to a standstill, and those that exceed certain noise levels
- introducing a statutory offence of public nuisance in place of the existing common law offence, which sets out to police and protestors the conduct that results in the law being broken
- protecting the police and other emergency workers by increasing sentences for anyone who assaults or harms an emergency worker while they are performing their role

Further guidance

Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations 2023

- [Read our guide to the changes from the Public Order Act 1986 \(Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community\) Regulations 2023](#)
- [Find out more about the Public Order Act 1986 \(Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community\) Regulations 2023](#)

Public Order Act 2023

- [Read our guide to the changes from the Public Order Act 2023](#)
- [Find out more about the Public Order Act 2023](#)

PCSCA 2022

- [Read our guide to the changes from the PCSCA 2022](#)
- [Find out more about the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act](#)

If you have further questions, [email the public order public safety team](#).

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