How journalists can stay safe in times of unrest

Corinne Chin
Case study

George Floyd protests: Seattle, WA
Ramon and I return to the newsroom to grab lunch after filming a peaceful protest at police headquarters.

We’re relieved the crowd was nothing like what we saw in Minneapolis earlier in the week. The next protest is downtown at 3 p.m.

Amanda asks if she can ride there with us after filing her photos, and we agree.

Amanda doesn’t finish filing until 2:30 p.m., but we’re too busy enjoying lunch to notice the time.

Ramon drives us all downtown — but the crowd is massive and streets are blocked. It’s 2:45 p.m. — there is no time to find parking.

Ramon tells us to hop out while he parks; he’ll find us later.
What should we do next?

◉ **Hop out of the car** — we’re late! I’ll share my phone location with Ramon so he can catch up with us.

◉ **Insist on finding a parking spot** together so we don’t get separated. But we’ll risk missing the moment, which would mean The Seattle Times won’t have *any* relevant coverage.
We were kettled right away.
Already some early clashes between police and protesters in Seattle.
What could we have done to prepare?
BEFORE:
What to Research

📍 **Location scouting**
- Visit ahead of time to scope out choke points, exit routes
- Or use Google Maps, Google Earth, even Snap Map
- Determine your team’s meeting points
  - Admin point
  - Security point
- Parking :)

📍 **Cultural norms**
- For the physical spaces
- For the people you’ll be reporting alongside
BEFORE:
What to Research

- Power structures
  - Police, military, etc.
  - Political, social, racial
BEFORE:
What to Plan

- Communication and digital security
  - Designated check-in times
  - How will you communicate with your colleagues and editor?
  - What if cell networks go down?
  - Biometric unlocking (Face ID and Touch ID)

- Risk tolerance
  - How will you signal you’re ready to leave?
  - What will you do if colleagues don’t respect your boundaries?
BEFORE: What to Bring

- Emergency contacts
- Identification
  - Press pass
  - Government ID
- Clothing
  - Appearance
  - Practicality
- Personal protective equipment
  - Respirator, goggles, etc.
  - Body armor?
- First Aid/Medical Kit
- A buddy!
BEFORE YOU GO:

Risk Assessment
## Risk Assessment Template

**Dates:** *When is the assignment? When was this risk assessment reviewed?*

**Activity:** *What are you doing?*

**Location:** *Where are you going? Break down by different locations/assignments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazards</th>
<th>Who/What is at Risk</th>
<th>Risk Rating/Impact</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Risk Mitigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Outline what could cause harm or damage**

For example:

- **Self**
- **Equipment** (e.g. damage, confiscation)
- **Digital security** (e.g. trolling, doxxing etc.)
- **Communication** (e.g. cell networks down)
- **Reputation**

**Consider the level of risk, in your opinion:**

- Negligible
- Minor
- Moderate
- Severe
- Critical

**Consider the level of risk, in your opinion:**

- Unlikely
- Possible
- Likely
- Certain or Imminent

**Precautions that should be in place to control each hazard**

and why  

and why
## Risk Assessment Template

**Dates:** May 30, 2020  
**Activity:** Protest after the killing of George Floyd  
**Location:** Westlake Park, downtown Seattle

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| Tear gas   | Self                      | **Moderate** with no mitigation        | **Certain/imminent;** Seattle Police use tear gas liberally for crowd dispersal | Respirator, goggles  
|            | Communication             | **Minor** with mitigation              |                                                      | Bring water  
|            |                           |                                        |                                                      | Seek elevation  
|            |                           |                                        |                                                      | Monitor wind direction |

Seattle Police use tear gas liberally for crowd dispersal.
DURING:
Situational Awareness

- Where are you? Where are the exits?
- Who is around you? Are they dangerous?
- Where is your team? How are they handling the situation?
- How is your presence impacting the environment? How are people reacting to you?
- How are you feeling? Is your current mental state impacting your decision making?
Covering protest
Additional resources
LEARN MORE:
Strategies for Safely Covering Civil Unrest
iwmf.org/strategies-for-safely-covering-civil-unrest/