

Committee: Environmental Commission Sub-Commission 1 (EC1)

Topic: Addressing the environmental impact caused by eco-terrorism

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Topic Introduction

Eco-terrorism, also known as bioterrorism, is a form of violence that causes ecological, economic, and political destruction. Environmental terrorists primarily consist of extremist pro-environment groups and radicalised individuals. Eco-terrorists justify their actions by claiming that they are trying to stop NGOs or businesses from harming the environment.

Nevertheless, a lot of the time, their tactics entail unlawful actions, which paradoxically might exacerbate environmental harm. Some examples of environmental harm caused by eco-terrorism include air pollution; damaged plants; destruction of natural habitats; and waste of natural resources. All actions in which activists interfere with the environment damage ecosystems and increase environmental footprint.

Activists' actions are usually not coordinated and are performed independently by a small quantity of members, sometimes even by specific individuals. Eco-terrorists use industrial machinery sabotage, arson against infrastructure they believe to be harmful to the environment, and even biological attacks to impede actions considered destructive to ecosystems.

This is a problem because eco-terrorist acts of civil disobedience not only harm the environment even more but also cause damages, resulting in the victims losing millions of dollars, which causes problems often on an international level.



Definition of key concepts

Eco-terrorism

“Destruction, or the threat of destruction, of the environment by states, groups, or individuals in order to intimidate or to coerce governments or civilians.”¹

Monkeywrenching

“Nonviolent disobedience and sabotage carried out by environmental activists against those whom they perceive to be ecological exploiters.”²

Tree spiking

“A method in which metal or ceramic spikes are driven deep within trees for the purpose of damaging chain saws or blades at sawmills.”³

Logging

“Process of harvesting trees, sawing them into appropriate lengths (bucking), and transporting them (skidding) to a sawmill.”⁴

Biocentrism

It is an ethical perspective holding that all life deserves equal moral consideration or has equal moral standing.⁵

¹ Elliott, Lorraine. “Ecoterrorism.” Encyclopædia Britannica, 2023, www.britannica.com/topic/ecoterrorism. Accessed 13 Dec. 2013.

² Palmer, Eric. “Monkeywrenching | Activism.” Encyclopædia Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/monkeywrenching. Accessed 22 Nov. 2013.

³ Palmer, Eric. “Tree Spiking | Activism.” Encyclopædia Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/tree-spiking. Accessed 22 Nov. 2013.

⁴ “Logging | Definition & Facts.” Encyclopædia Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/logging-forestry. Accessed 14 July 2024.

⁵ Joseph R. DesJardins. “Biocentrism.” Saving Earth | Encyclopedia Britannica, 23 Apr. 2020, www.britannica.com/explore/savingearth/biocentrism.



Ecocide

“Destruction of the natural environment of an area, or very great damage to it.”⁶

Biodiversity

“The existence of a large number of different kinds of animals and plants which make a balanced environment.”⁷

Ecological Footprint

“Measure of the demands made by a person or group of people on global natural resources.”⁸

Background Information

Historical Background

⁶ Cambridge Dictionary. “Ecocide.” @CambridgeWords, 8 June 2022,

www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ecocide.

⁷ “Biodiversity Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com.” www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com,

www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/biodiversity?q=biodiversity. Accessed 24 July 2024.

⁸ Hayden, Anders. “Ecological Footprint | Description, History, Importance, & Limitations | Britannica.” Encyclopædia Britannica, 26 Dec. 2019, www.britannica.com/science/ecological-footprint. Accessed 3 June 2023.



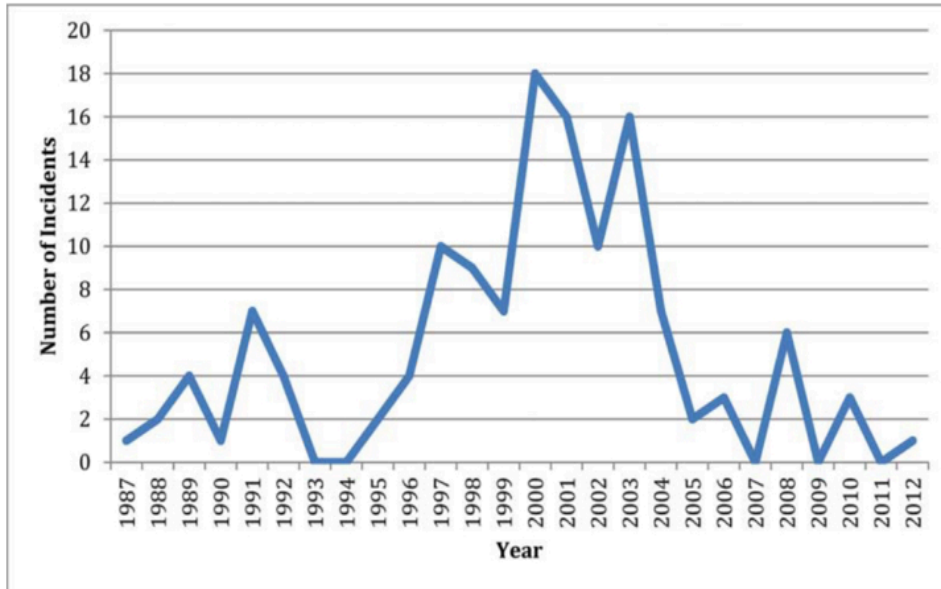


Figure 1: Number of eco-terrorism incidents by year from 1987 to 2012⁹

Eco-terrorism was first officially reported in 1987 although studies show that some eco-terrorist incidents had occurred earlier. Since the end of 2003, there has been a decline in eco-terrorism after its peak in late 1990s and early 2000s, reaching 18 incidents. This happened because many governments of countries in Europe and the United States of America (USA) (where most cases occurred) started acting against eco-terrorist activity after it became more common and eco-terrorist groups gained huge popularity. The most common years for accidents before the year 2000 were 1991 (7) and 1997 (10). In those years, two eco-terrorism organisations (Earth First! and Earth Liberation Front (ELF)) gained prominence and extreme popularity. On the other hand, the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI’s) investigation of eco-terrorism incidents rose significantly in 2000 (18) and continued throughout the ensuing years mostly due to increased public awareness.

⁹ Assessing the Attractiveness and Vulnerability of Eco-Terrorism Targets: A Situational Crime Prevention Approach, www.researchgate.net/publication/276455844_Assessing_the_Attractiveness_and_Vulnerability_of_Eco-Terrorism_Targets_A_Situational_Crime_Prevention_Approach [accessed Jun 26 2024].



Targets of Eco-Terrorism

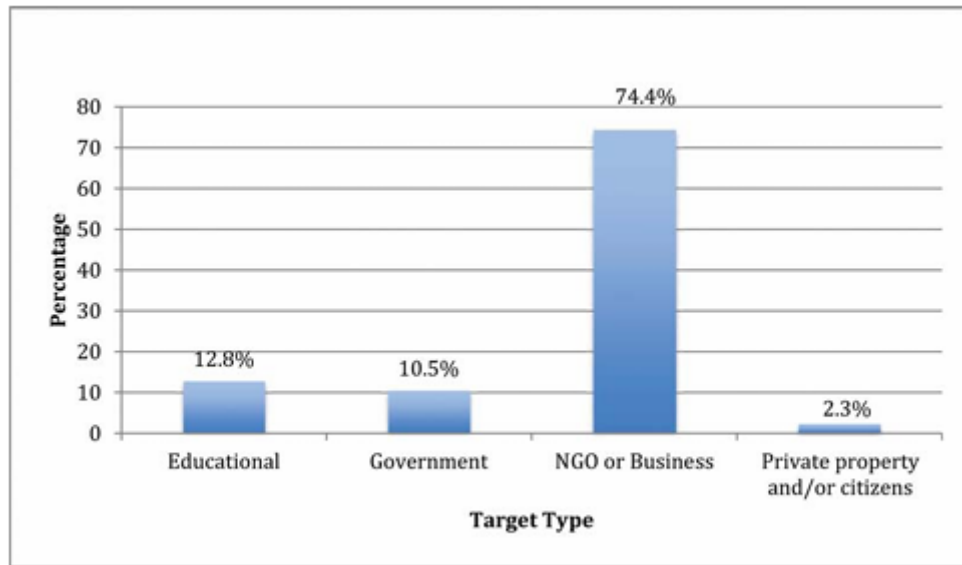


Figure 2: Types of eco-terrorism targets⁹

Businesses and other NGOs are the primary targets that eco-terrorists choose to attack. Agricultural activities and other local commercial targets are perceived to be harmful to the environment and animals, therefore they are the most frequently targeted company categories. The second most prevalent category of targets comprise educational targets, encompassing university research laboratories and persons engaged in plant or animal research.

Governmental targets (such as the United States' Department of Agriculture facilities) and private individuals and their property (such as personal vehicles) are, on the other hand, the least frequent categories of targets as they tend to make little to no environmental harm.

Tactics and Methods Employed by Eco-Terrorists

Many tactics that are harmful for the environment are used by different eco-terrorist groups. Some common actions might include property damage as well as sabotage, vandalism, wildfires, threats, protests, and many more acts of civil disobedience.

Other less common methods often include bombing, monkeywrenching, and tree spiking. Monkeywrenching is driven by a concern for the preservation of life. Civil disobedience situations that are common include activists on boats placing themselves between a harpoon and a whale or chaining themselves to earthmoving machinery. In the action of tree spiking, a nail or metal rod is being pushed into the tree. Even though it damages trees, it will eventually stop loggers from moving forward and break the machine once they hit the spike.

Causes

Eco-terrorist action can have many causes. Because they are pro-environment, their motive is to protect the environment from what they see as harm brought about by human exploitation, excessive consumption, and egoism. Their aim is to limit development, with an anti-economic motivation. Activists are trying to emphasise on the cruelty and harm towards the environment which is often not acknowledged by the government and take measures to protect the environment.

Pollution, deforestation, illegal hunting, and harming living creatures are the prime environmental problems that have led to eco terrorism. This results in a loss of biodiversity and more intense occurrences of ecocide.

Impacts

Environmental impact

Although eco-terrorists are pro-environment which means that they do it for a greater environmental goal, there is plenty of negative impact. Eco-terrorism can have both negative and positive environmental impacts. Some actions such as arson or bombing might damage natural habitat. Forest fires not only cause air pollution but also reduce the loss of vegetation resulting in a lot of animals dying due to lack of food and shelter. Even though eco-terrorists aim to protect the environment, their tactics can exacerbate the very problems they are trying to tackle. On the other hand, their actions improve public awareness of environmental concerns and bring up policy reforms targeted at protecting the environment.

Socio-economic impact

Property destruction is nearly always one of the outcomes of ecoterrorism strikes. For example, activists were charged 12 million in damages that followed from the arson attack on the Vail Ski



Resort that they did not pay that followed from the arson attack on the Vail Ski Resort. The resort faced operational delays and financial difficulties as a result of this attack making it impossible for the ski resort to expand. Furthermore, the financial and operational interruption that comes with eco-terrorism may make it difficult for NGOs and companies who are impacted to carry out their research and projects. However, it can be useful in drawing attention from the public and the government to concerns that were previously ignored, such as the endangerment of species and the environmental effects of specific actions.

Case studies

Vail Ski Resort Arson (1998)

On the 19th of October 1998, some members of the eco-terrorist organisations Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF) set a huge fire on the Vail Mountain to a ski resort in Colorado. They set fire to 3 buildings using petrol cans resulting in over 12-million-dollar damage¹⁰. The protesters claimed that the expansion of the Vail Ski Resort would destroy lynx habitat, thus their actions can be justified as an attempt to save the endangered species. As a result, 6 out of the 7 people in charge have been imprisoned for the last 20 years.

Oakridge Ranger Station Arson (1996)

On October 28th, 1996, Oakridge Ranger Station, specifically part of the U.S. Forest Service was attacked by members of the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Most of the documents related to its environmental monitoring programs and experiments disappeared in the fire. The attack resulted in a total loss of \$5,074,189¹¹ but it does not account for lost research material. The aim was to protest against logging which was damaging forests and wildlife habitats.

¹⁰ Anastasio, Jeff, and Landon Haaf. "The Night Vail Mountain Was Set Ablaze in a Historic Act of Ecoterrorism, 25 Years

Later." Denver 7 Colorado News (KMGH), 19 Oct. 2023,

www.denver7.com/news/local-news/the-night-vail-mountain-was-set-ablaze-in-a-historic-act-of-ecoterrorism-25-years-later. Accessed 19 Oct. 2023.

¹¹ "Incident Summary for GTDID: 199610300011." Www.start.umd.edu,

www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=199610300011.



<u>March 26, 1984</u>	Earth First! Used an act of tree spiking for the first time.
<u>October 19, 1988</u>	Earth Liberation Front (ELF) set fire to a company called Vail Resort in Colorado claiming that expansion of the Vail Resort would endanger lynx habitat.
<u>August 26, 1992</u>	The Animal Enterprise Protection Act (AEPA 1992) was passed. It was designed to deter illegal disruptions of animal-related commerce. It is impartial on the subject of animal welfare or rights as a legal tool.
<u>October 30, 1996</u>	When the ELF destroyed the Oakridge Ranger Station, the state of Oregon took notice. Following a string of actions that brought them national exposure, the ELF was dubbed an eco-terrorist organisation and ranked among the top domestic terror risks in the United States.
<u>November 27, 2006</u>	The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) in 2006 signed into law to justify the new legislation. The advocates claimed, citing certain recent actions, that radicals for animal rights were employing new strategies like threats and singled out those connected to animal businesses, and that the current legislation had not served as a strong enough deterrent.

Major countries/ organizations and alliances

France

Most protests regarding eco-terrorism in France occurred due to deforestation, industrial pollution, and nuclear power. Ecoterrorism is usually led in France by radical groups such as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Les Zone à Défendre (Les ZADistes), which is a group only seen in France. A significant incident occurred in 2019 - the attack on the Lafarge business cement production of La Malle in Bouc-Bel-Air. Environmental activists attacked this company as they were primarily

motivated by local air pollution. During this attack, several techniques were used to target the plant's infrastructure such as: graffiti spraying; vehicle and construction equipment damage; sabotage of incinerators and electrical systems and devices; cable cutting; and crushing and spilling cement bags. In the response, the French government arrested most activists.

Brazil

Radical environmentalist organisations such as the Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)) and activists opposing industrial projects that affect the Amazon rainforest and deforestation are examples of ecoterrorism in Brazil. Activists tried to take direct action such as protests and bombing but due to the fact that some members were getting killed, those acts nearly stopped.

Earth First!

Earth First! was the first eco-terrorist organisation focused on safeguarding ecosystems and animals established in 1980. Activists engaged in many acts of civil disobedience and protests. Earth First came to be predominantly connected with taking direct action against development projects that could lead to the devastation of natural areas or the habitats of wildlife. This covers activities that have a major environmental impact, such as building dams, logging, and other industrial development projects. Many new members of Earth First!, including those from the counterculture and leftist or anarchist political backgrounds, were drawn to the organisation as it started gaining success and popularity being the only eco-terrorist organisation at the time.

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF)

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF), a far-left extremist organisation, is primarily concerned with protecting animal rights. Despite having its roots in the UK, the group is now active in 40 other nations. ALF has committed arson and vandalism committed against farms, restaurants, animal research institutions, and other establishments that they believe to be harmful to animals aiming to liberate animals from cruelty, harm those who profit from the suffering and exploitation of animals, reveal hidden acts of cruelty to animals by nonviolent activities and animal liberation, and take all necessary care to avoid harming humans or animals. It has recently become one of the most active extremist elements in the United States.



The Earth Liberation Front (ELF)

The ELF is an eco-terrorist group made up of autonomous cells that carry out attacks on those that the group accuses of damaging the environment. The most famous tactic ELF uses is monkeywrenching, which includes tree spiking, arson, sabotage of logging or construction equipment, and other types of property destruction. They have committed acts of vandalism to many private companies and businesses, such as the attack on the Vail Resort in Colorado in 1988. The Department of Homeland Security registered 239 arson and bombing assaults between 1995 and 2010, of which ELF alone was held accountable for 55% of them¹².

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Passing Federal Laws

Emerging eco-terrorist attacks in the USA by ALF led the Congress to pass federal laws. The first law was the Animal Enterprise Protection Act of 1992 (AEPA of 1992) which discourages the unlawful disruption of commerce involving animals. The same reasons as in AEPA of 1992 were made again in the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act of 2006 (AETA of 2006) which targets for prosecution of American citizens who would advocate for animal protection. However, the wording of the AETA of 2006 includes a wide range of First Amendment activities, including boycotts, picketing, and undercover investigations, provided that they interfere with an animal company by resulting in a loss of revenues. Thus, none of the two laws completely solved the issue as a whole because laws' critics claimed that both laws were unduly broad and unclear; that the fines they imposed were unduly severe; and that they would put a stop to any kind of protest related to animal rights.

Addressing dual threats for global stability

¹² National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism an Overview of Bombing and Arson Attacks by Environmental and Animal Rights Extremists in The. 1995.

www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OPSR_TP_TEVUS_Bombing-Arson-Attacks_Environmental-Animal%20Rights-Extremists_1309-508.pdf



It is clear that ecological deterioration poses a threat to our ecosystem and is a major factor in the destabilisation of regions, which increases their vulnerability to terrorist attacks. Combining counterterrorism, Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), and climate change countermeasures appears to be a successful method as it is focused on potential answers. It is possible to better customise strategies by considering the influence of climate on radicalization. Making P/CVE programming eco-friendly is a noteworthy paradigm change. This entails preparing people for careers that actively fight climate change or are resistant to its effects which affect eco-terrorism.

Possible solutions

Strengthening legal frameworks

Governments can strengthen and enforce new laws regarding the issue of eco-terrorism. It is crucial to implement clear laws and regulations with direct action targeting the issue of eco-terrorism in more countries around the world. Laws with more severe and clear punishments, for example, higher fines or jail time, can be implemented to prevent individuals from committing acts of civil disobedience and providing a clear legal basis for their punishment. Raising fines would not only create more fear of holding an eco-terrorist attack, but also help the victims to fix damaged equipment. Furthermore, stricter punishments may act as a discouragement, meaning that potential criminals will be less likely to use extreme methods and that the legal system will be more prepared to deal with and respond to these threats, all of which will improve public safety and security in general.

Implementing advanced intelligence

The implementation of sophisticated intelligence and monitoring systems can enhance the detection and prevention of ecoterrorist activities, thus fortifying security protocols.

Creating ethical rules

Government actions that correspond better with the ideals of environmental activists are necessary to set moral standards. The primary goals are lowering the frequency of incidents related to ecoterrorism and promoting nonviolent methods of environmental conservation. As long as



government policies support the objectives of activists and encourage the creation of more environmentally friendly and peaceful methods of environmental preservation, attacks by eco-terrorists will decline

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