**Extinction Rebellion 'criminals' threaten UK way of life, says Priti Patel**

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The home secretary, Priti Patel, has claimed [Extinction Rebellion](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/extinction-rebellion) activists are “so-called eco-crusaders turned criminals” who threaten key planks of national life.

The government’s rhetorical venom against XR was triggered by the [blockading of newspaper print works](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/05/climate-activists-accused-of-attacking-free-press-by-blockading-print-works) at the weekend, which disrupted the distribution of some newspapers and led to scores of arrests.

The Guardian understands, however, that despite the government threatening to crack down on the climate emergency group, more than a year of talks between police and ministers about law changes has yet to produce any public plans.

Patel described XR as an “emerging threat” in a speech to the annual conference of the [Police](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/police) Superintendents’ Association on Tuesday.

She said XR was “attempting to thwart the media’s right to publish without fear nor favour”, and claimed their campaign of civil disobedience was “a shameful attack on our way of life, our economy and the livelihoods of the hard-working majority”.

“I refuse point blank to allow that kind of anarchy on our streets,” the home secretary told the virtual conference.

“The very criminals who disrupt our free society must be stopped. And together we must all stand firm against the guerilla tactics of Extinction Rebellion.”

More than 100 protesters used vehicles and bamboo structures to block roads outside the Newsprinters printing works at Broxbourne, in Hertfordshire, and Knowsley, near Liverpool, on Friday evening. It took until Saturday to fully remove them. The presses print the News UK titles including the Sun, Times, Sun on Sunday and Sunday Times, as well as the Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph, and Daily Mail.

Over the weekend government briefings floated the idea of classing XR as an [“organised crime group”](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/06/extinction-rebellion-organised-crime-group-ridiculous-uk). Neither Patel nor the policing minister Kit Malthouse repeated that idea in the Commons on Monday, with police believing it is nonsense.

The police regard XR as a non-violent group committed to civil disobedience that is time-consuming and costly for officers to deal with.

One senior police source said officers had enough powers: “The powers are there. They [XR] are not an organised crime group. Part of the definition of an OCG is they commit violence in achieving their aims, and no one seriously suggests XR commit violence.”

Police who dealt with the XR weekend action described it as “sophisticated” and a well-prepared military-style operation.

One source said: “It takes hours to get them off. You have to go slowly and carefully.”

Last year XR caused disruption in London with their campaigns, triggering talks between police chiefs and the Home Office about changes to specific sections of the 1986 Public Order Act.

The Guardian understands that changes could include lowering the threshold at which police can place restrictions. One change could mean the prospect of “disruption” is enough to impose tough conditions, not “serious disruption” as the act currently states.

Sarah Lunnon, a spokesperson for Extinction Rebellion, said: “Our media and our government are captured by vested interests. They do not want to see change. Three companies alone own 87% of the national newspaper market.

“These powerful vested interests are the real organised criminals. They are the true threat to our democracy. And it’s depressing – although no surprise – that so much of the political and media elite has jumped to their defence, and jumped at the opportunity to suppress people power and grassroots protest. We will not allow them to criminalise the noble tradition of non-violent civil disobedience.”