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Guide to civil disobedience updated for Games

By **Stephanie Levitz**, The Canadian Press Posted Wednesday, November 25, 2009 9:09 AM ET

VANCOUVER - A Vietnam-era guide to civil disobedience has been updated for the 2010 Winter Olympics as legal advocates prepare for the likelihood of widespread protests during the Games.

The 43-page Olympic edition of the Protesters Guide contains a rundown of what rights protesters have in B.C. and tips on what to bring to a demonstration, what to wear and what to say.

"B.C. has a long history of civil disobedience and quite regrettably at times one that has become violent and at other times has also resulted in criminal charges being laid," said Leo McGrady, a Vancouver-based lawyer who wrote the Olympic version of the guide which was released this week.

"And so the purpose of the book is to provide legal advice to people who have made their own decision to engage in civil disobedience."

Among the suggestions it contains are writing the name and number of a lawyer on an arm in case of arrest and watching out for undercover police officers whose aim is to provoke violence in order to justify massive arrests.

That was an issue during a 2007 Security and Prosperity partnership meeting in Quebec City, where video captured masked protesters trying to convince people to throw rocks.

They were later unmasked as police.

The guide has existed since 1968 and was originally drafted for Vietnam War protesters. McGrady did an updated version just before the APEC summit in Vancouver twelve years ago this week.

Large-scale protests at the 1997 event eventually led to a government inquiry into police response and recommendations on how rights can be respected without compromising security at major events.

He said putting out an Olympic version of the guide was partly motivated by the publicly combative relationship so far between known activist groups and the security unit overseeing the Games.

"There are signs that things could become difficult," he said.

"There are also signs that people are very, very unhappy about the cost of the Games and deficits being announced now."

So far, several groups have announced their intention to protest at the Games.

One is a loosely-knit coalition operating under the banner of No Olympics on Stolen Native Land that disrupted the first day of the 2010 Olympic torch relay in Victoria.

The other is a group called Impact on Communities Coalition who decided this week to hold a protest mid-way through the Games to draw attention to housing issues.

Protesters have cried foul over police officers visiting their homes and offices in search of information on planned anti-Olympic activity.

The RCMP-led Integrated Security Unit has said the meetings were designed to try and find ways to work with activist groups to ensure "lawful" protest during the Games.

In the guide, McGrady does recommend that groups consider working with police.

But he said one measure that Olympic security personnel are using -- the establishment of zones dedicated to protest -- should be ignored.

"Free speech zones are a travesty of free speech and the very notion of free speech and so I don't recommend those be used and I don't believe anyone will use them," he said.

The guide also gives an overview of the various pieces of legislation and court judgments that have established rules around civil disobedience in Canada and in B.C.

McGrady pointed out that rules around an Olympics are a bit different than everyday events.

There are travel restrictions, rules about the use of Olympic symbols and words and also city bylaws around signage.

Some of the rules put in place by the Olympic organizing committee are contained in the spectator guide to the Olympics, a printed copy of which was obtained by The Canadian Press.

Much of the information from the guide has been available on the Internet for months, but a published copy will be sent beginning in December to everyone who bought a ticket for the Games.

For example, the guide says that "displays of signage and banners containing religious, political, provocative or obscene content and-or visible branding and trademarks of sponsor and non-sponsor countries" are prohibited in venues.

McGrady said those are not really much of a departure from what happens at airports or other public buildings.

The spectator guide also cautions people to dress appropriately for the weather, especially for outdoor events, and gives competition schedules, venue rules and tips for how to get to and from events.

Organizers have given assurances that the use of Olympic images or potentially critical graphics on T-shirts in venues won't be policed unless they are used in a manner to block other spectators from watching the Games.

A copy of the protest guide can be found on the Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada website at www.lrwc.org

<http://www.ctvolympics.ca/about-vancouver/news/newsid=20581.html>

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