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## Olympic Protesters' Legal Guide

Posted By [Simon Fodden](#) On December 12, 2009 @ 9:58 am In [Legal Information, Practice of Law, Substantive Law](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

[Lawyers Rights Watch Canada](#) <sup>[1]</sup> (LRWC), an organization that assists lawyers around the world who themselves defend human rights, has published a "[Protesters' Guide to the Law of Civil Disobedience in British Columbia – Olympic Edition](#)" <sup>[2]</sup> [PDF].

The forty-three-page guide is anything but a sketchy pamphlet for marchers on the front line; it's a serious, accessible, and well-written handbook. Produced by [Leo McGrady](#) <sup>[3]</sup> originally in 1970 in connection with protests against the Vietnam war, according to [a story in the Globe and Mail](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, and updated a number of times since then, it aims to

. . . inform you of your rights when dealing with the police at public demonstrations. It is designed to help you exercise your right to engage in non-violent civil disobedience, and avoid committing any criminal offence. It is also designed to assist you in the event you are arrested.

What I find refreshing about the guide is its return to a focus on more or less classical civil disobedience, which is to say making a political point by doing what the powers-that-be don't want you to do without necessarily breaking the criminal law — and being willing to accept the consequences of that behaviour as part of the protest.

The guide begins with a short essay on Canadian civil disobedience in recent times. It then becomes intensely practical. For example, there's counsel about whether it's wise to wear a mask at demonstrations, what it's useful to bring along to a demonstration, what to do if pepper spray is used against you, and even a small section on the new "sonic guns" Vancouver police are equipped with.

A long section gives sensible advice about dealing with the police, offering information about fundamental rights and at the same time down-to-earth examples of how they might apply in various situations. There's even a section at the end on demonstrating in the United States that provides some fairly stern warnings about how different things might be there. (And I have to say that if there's any truth to the [Boing Boing report](#) <sup>[5]</sup> about the treatment of Peter Watt at the US border this week, I'd build up a large defence fund and get some extra medical insurance before venturing south for anything other than the sun.)

We've [posted on Slaw before](#) <sup>[6]</sup> about the Olympic Committee's efforts to dampen and contain protests. (Just yesterday there was a [report](#) <sup>[7]</sup> that Vancouver had ordered the removal of an anti-Olympic mural, the doctored image of which accompanies this post, under the bylaw against "graffiti.")

There is also [a recent Slaw entry](#) <sup>[8]</sup> on Lawyers Rights Watch Canada.

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URLs in this post:

[1] Lawyers Rights Watch Canada: <http://www.lrwc.org/index.php>

[2] Protesters' Guide to the Law of Civil Disobedience in British Columbia – Olympic Edition: <http://www.lrwc.org/documents/Civil.Disobedience.Guide.November.20.2009.F.pdf>

[3] Leo McGrady: [http://www.mbwlaw.ca/the\\_firm.htm](http://www.mbwlaw.ca/the_firm.htm)

[4] a story in the Globe and Mail:

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/protesters-guide-to-the-olympics-vs-the-bloy-wonder/article1384940/>

[5] Boing Boing report: <http://www.boingboing.net/2009/12/11/dr-peter-watts-canad.html>

[6] posted on Slaw before: <http://www.slaw.ca/2009/10/11/proposed-olympic-sign-legislation-in-b-c/>

[7] a report: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/vancouver-orders-removal-of-anti-olympic-mural/article1396541/>

[8] a recent Slaw entry: <http://www.slaw.ca/2009/07/23/lawyers-rights-watch/>

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