

Locking Down with Lockboxes

From Crimethinc.'s Recipes for Disaster

When it comes to blockading, lockboxes are very useful, assuming you are willing to be arrested. The design described here has been used in several cities, including some in which the police are experts at "handling" protests, and all the same it can take police hours to move blockaders who use them from a busy street. It is one of the simplest designs; there are many other possibilities. You can make lockboxes with 90-degree angles in them that accommodate both arms of one individual, so one person can comfortably lock down to a gate, a truck axle, or even a railroad track. For serious engagements, you can make big concrete barrels with lockboxes fitted inside them, or dig a hole in the ground and build a vertical one-way lockbox into it with concrete and rebar, or drive a junker car into place, disable it, and lock down to it.

Lockdowns can be used to stop movement into and out of an area, providing a spectacle perfect for attracting media or other attention. They can stall traffic to allow support teams to hold an awareness-raising rally, and distribute leaflets to or otherwise engage drivers stuck in traffic. After blockaders are removed from the area, police generally block the area for another hour or more themselves, lengthening the impact of the action. Lockdowns can appeal to the public by showing that people are dedicated enough to put their bodies on the line; they are descended from a long heritage of nonviolent civil disobedience that many civilians find less threatening than other brands of direct action.

Ingredients

- Metal or plastic tubing or PIPING — such as PVC pipe
- Bolts and nuts—at least one bolt and one nut for each box
- Chain or rope
- Carabiners
- Glue—optional, but encouraged
- Hacksaw
- Drill
- Bolt cutters—optional
- At least one person ready to put their body on the line

Instructions

A lockbox is a piece of pipe by which a person can be locked securely to another person or object. The average lockbox accommodates two people; with several lockboxes and people, you can form a human chain.

Lockboxes utilize the width of your torso and arm-span to take up space. To lock down, you attach yourself to a mechanism inside a piece of pipe; in order for a police officer to unlock you, he would have to get his arm into the pipe as well, but as the pipe fits snugly around your arm, this is impossible. Should

police attempt to pull you apart, the strain will be on the metal chain and bolt, not your shoulder joints, assuming your box is built correctly. By using a carabiner to connect to a bolt within the pipe, you are able to detach from the box immediately whenever you choose. With lockboxes, a group of people can swiftly move into a space, block it, and defy the efforts of police officers who would remove them.

Scouting the Target, Planning the Action

The first step is to scout the area you want to blockade. There are a wide variety of environments in which you might choose to apply lockboxes, but for the purposes of this introduction we'll assume that you will be operating in an urban environment. You could blockade the entrance to an event or business, or an entrance to a tunnel, highway, or access ramp. The first step is to figure out where the traffic, whether it be car, foot, or other, can best be bottlenecked. Often, if you block one street successfully, you can snarl traffic in a large area. Look for streets that lead to main roadways, and watch the traffic patterns. If you are planning to block a road, listen to traffic reports; determine which roads gridlock easily and which roads feed major transportation routes. Note all the details of your target, including the length of traffic lights, which lanes are open at certain times, and which directions the majority of cars turn.

Once you have found the location that best serves your purposes, you'll need to determine how many people it will take to block it. If you have a well-chosen target, but you do not have enough people, traffic will still be able to pass, and you will simply be a nuisance, not a blockade; if you cannot create a "complete circuit" with your human chain, connecting it at either end to immovable points, it may be easy to move you out of the way even if the lockboxes between people are secure. To measure distances quickly and subtly, you can count your steps heel-to-toe across an area, or run string or yam across it. You'll also need to take into account the sizes of the lockboxes you are making and the people locking down. If a street is 20' wide and your lockboxes are 3' long, you'll probably need five or six people.

Plan your formation carefully. If you are locking down in a line, the two people on the ends can be locked to stationary objects—with bicycle U-locks around their necks, for example, or by a less secure means such as chain locks. If you use bicycle locks or any other locks that require keys, have an accomplice to spirit the key away quickly or be prepared to hide it where the sun doesn't shine. For a less durable blockade, you could leave the ends of your formation open and sit or lie down. Alternatively, you could close the formation at both ends, locking down in a circle, or form two lines crossing each other in an X.

When planning, take into account the strain of being locked in place for a long period. If the lock boxes are not supported by something, those locked together will quickly be worn out by holding them up. There are also the matters of food and blood circulation to consider.

Gathering Materials

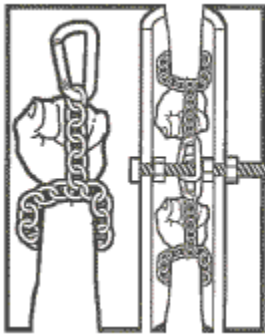
Once you have worked out your plan, the next step is to gather materials. These can be expensive, so look around for places to acquire them for free. PVC pipe can be found at construction sites; chains can be cut from a locked dumpster; tools can be borrowed or stolen. If you do not want to draw attention, you may want to buy the supplies at multiple locations. While purchases of bolts, carabiners, and glue will not attract attention, a septum-pierced revolutionary may raise eyebrows if she brings thirty feet of PVC pipe to the counter. Rumor has it that before and during mass mobilizations, store employees are told to look

out for such purchases. Use the same care you would for buying spray paint, crowbars, bolt cutters, or glass etching solution. Do not use a credit card if you do not wish to create a paper trail.

Design, Construction, Adaption, and Fortification

Summary:

1. Cut the pipe to the appropriate length.
2. Drill a hole all the way through both walls of the pipe at its midpoint (or thereabouts, depending on the differing armspans of the two who will be using it).
3. Pass a bolt through both holes.
4. Secure the bolt.
5. Cut a length of chain to fit around your wrist and reach up to the bolt.
6. Fasten a carabiner to the chain by which to secure it to the bolt.
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 for the person who will share the lockbox with you.
8. Fortify the lockbox.



The construction of lockboxes can be a fun group activity. Make sure the people who are going to use the boxes try them on and modify them according to arm length and other variables. How much of your arm goes inside a lockbox is a matter of preference and tactical strategy, but on average your pipe should be about 4' in length. The more of your arm is covered by the PVC pipe, the more of your body is safe from police action. For example, if your bicep is exposed, the police could attempt to use pain compliance there to force you to unlock yourself; if your entire arm is in the pipe, this is impossible.

Everyone's arms are unique. If you are locking down, you need to be able to put your arm far enough into the pipe to grab the bolt, so you can easily connect and disconnect your carabiner. If the people who are to use the box can be present during the construction, measure their arms and custom-fit the pipe. If this is not possible, build the box to a length that almost anyone can use—say, between 3' and 4'. If you are using PVC pipe, it can easily be cut with a standard hacksaw. For more long-lasting lockdowns, use more durable piping.

It's important that your pipe be the right diameter; you should be comfortable sliding your arm in at least to your bicep. Unless your arm is extremely small or large, the pipe should be between 4" and 6" in diameter. After the pipe is cut so that both people who are to use it can put their arms in as far as they

want and touch fingers, secure a bolt at the point where their fingers touch. The length of the bolt should be longer than the diameter of the pipe; if you use a 5" pipe, make sure your bolt is at least 5.5". Stay away from bolts with sharp threads or a sharp point on one end, unless you are prepared to modify them for safety and comfort. Your bolt should be thick and difficult to cut; it will probably be the weakest link in the chain, so you'll want to be careful to make sure it's as secure as possible.

Drill a hole all the way through one wall of the pipe and out the other. If You have to drill the top hole first and then flip the pipe to drill the bottom hole, make sure the holes line up! Put the bolt through both holes. It should be slightly off-center in the pipe, so the people locking to it can fit their fingers around it and have space for their knuckles. Now use nuts to secure it in place; these can go inside the pipe, or outside it, or both. You can use powerful glue to strengthen the bolt; better yet, if you have the means, weld it into place. You could include multiple bolts in your design, to make it harder for the police to know where to start. If you have more than one bolt, you can also experiment with attaching yourself to all of them.

Now you have to build the chain bracelet that secures you to the bolt inside the pipe. Cut a length of chain that can loop around your wrist at one end, and attach at the other end around the bolt in the pipe; it will be in the shape of a P. Experiment with chain length until you have a comfortable fit. Make the clasp that holds the chain around your wrist permanent and durable; use a carabiner to clasp the chain around the bolt, so you are able to unclasp from the lock box in an emergency.

Attaching the chain to the central bolt with a carabiner is a very secure and safe option, but there are others. For a simpler, though weaker, variation, skip the central bolt entirely and run a length of chain through the tube to attach your wrist to the wrist of your partner. This option might be useful if you have limited time and funding to prepare for the action. A benefit of the central bolt is that when you are pulled, the bolt absorbs some of the force, and gripping it can provide some control; if you are connected to another person by a chain directly, and one of you is pulled or dragged, both of you will bear the brunt of it.

Once the device is assembled, the holes drilled, the bolt secured, and the chain attached, make sure it all fits comfortably. Put some padding around the chain at your wrist, and pad the entrance to the tube if need be. If nothing else, wrap the chain in an old sock or two, and sand down the edges of the pipe to prevent it from cutting your arm.

The final step is to fortify your creation. Many police departments now understand how lockboxes are constructed and know how to disassemble them. This does not mean locking down is ineffective, since it still takes the police time to react, retrieve the necessary tools, and cut apart each lockbox; but it is worth brainstorming about how to stay ahead of their technology. The police are likely to try to cut the pipe to expose your hand and the carabiner, or attack the box at the bolt. Consider ways to slow this process. You could wrap the lockbox in materials that dull saw blades, for example, or wind layers of duct tape and wire around it, or cover it in viscous tar and sand, or weld rebar armor to it—or do all of these! The more layers of material that require different forms of cutting technology, the better. For heavy lockboxes that can anchor you in place, you could put a layer of concrete around your pipe, and a layer of plastic or aluminum drain tubing around that.

Practice and Transport

After all of the boxes are constructed, practice locking in and out of them. Do this alone until you have it down, then try it with a partner, locking at once into both sides of a box. Before an action, practice for speed and organization with everyone who will be involved, so things will go smoothly on the big day. To prevent confusion, you can label each end of each lockbox, and plan out which direction each person will face and the order in which people will lock together. It can help to have individuals involved who do not actually lock down on the line; not only can they help get things together quickly at the beginning, they can also provide food and water to the people who cannot move their arms, and help deal with police and others.

It can be a challenge to get all the lockboxes to the site of the lockdown. You could hide them nearby in advance, or bear them there in a march, disguised as puppets or banners. If you have access to a car, you can use it to drop off all the lockboxes at the very moment your group suddenly converges at the chosen site. If you are doing a long line, you have access to several cars, and speed is of the essence, pairs could get locked together in vehicles before driving to the area, then all be dropped off at the site and link up in a matter of seconds. A large group of people walking any distance with bulky lockboxes will probably attract the wrong kind of attention, especially if the authorities are on the lookout for civil disobedience, although you could come up with clever ways to camouflage them in a pinch.

As in all blockading, if you are blocking a road or highway that is in use, it is very important to stop traffic first. This can most easily be accomplished by another group working in concert with those who lock down; it is a lot to ask of a small group that they stop traffic, then lock themselves properly together while holding it at bay. Angry drivers can be even more dangerous than police under these circumstances; be careful not to give them the opportunity to do anything stupid.

Once You're Locked Together

The people who have come with you to play supporting roles can complement your blockade with a rally, street party, or outreach event. If you are blocking a street, there will be drivers to witness street theater or receive pamphlets; if you're blocking the entrance to an official event, there may be reporters to record you issuing your statement. Either way, there will be curious passersby who deserve to be told more about what's going on and why, and perhaps to be entertained in the bargain. If your lockdown is going to create a traffic jam, and you are concerned that the action might be misinterpreted as an attack on civilian drivers, consider distributing peace offerings such as homemade brownies.

Those locking down can be dressed in symbolic or expressive garb—or, for that matter, in nothing at all—or draped in a banner explaining the reason for the action. If your human chain is not connected to anything at the ends, you could conceivably move from one point to another while locked together, but this will not be easy or particularly safe. If you are planning on moving at all, you should practice in advance, and perhaps designate coordinators to talk everyone through certain movements or count off marching steps. Whether you expect this to be an issue or not, it is wise to prepare a basic communication and decision-making structure in advance, if there are more than a couple of you planning to lock down together.

Police Reactions, Legal Consequences

Ultimately, there is no way to predict for sure how the police will react, so avoid spending hours debating it in your group. It is important to have a police Liaison present to negotiate with the authorities or at least make sure they understand the situation, and reporters or other witnesses to temper or at least document their behavior. If they start to do something that seems dangerous, calmly inform them that your arm is inside the tube and that you are unable to remove it, and that a team of crack lawyers eagerly awaits the chance to sue them into oblivion. Police will always try to intimidate you; call their bluff, while maintaining your composure. In a worst-case scenario, they may use pepper spray or a similar weapon on you—but remember, this will cost them a lot in the public eye, especially if you bear this persecution courageously.

If your line is anchored at each end, they may begin by trying to disengage the people in the anchoring roles. If they can move the entire line out of the way and work on you once you are no longer blocking traffic, they probably will, but this will be difficult if you are seated or supine. If they can't move you all, they will work lockbox by lockbox, cutting the line into smaller, more moveable sections. The method the police use to cut you out will depend on how experienced they are. No police department wants a lawsuit, so they will probably be careful not to injure you. If you hide the location of the central bolt, they will have no way of knowing where your hands are inside the tube; this will prevent them from simply cutting the tube in half. Often, the police will call in the fire department to use special tools designed for removing people from wreckage. Last time I locked down, the police brought special wooden frames to support our PVC pipe lockboxes, then slowly dismantled the boxes with wire cutters, saws, and various other tools.

It is also difficult to predict what your charges will be when you are arrested at the end of your lockdown. In this author's experience, among others, the charge has been "incommoding," the same charge you get for blocking a street or similar conduit with your body. The use of lockboxes is not a separate crime, though the police may make threats or try to tack on additional charges such as "possession of implements of crime" (PIC). In both the lockdowns in which I participated, the police told us that because we used the lockboxes we would be charged with an additional PIC offense, but of course, as police are wont to do, they were lying. PVC pipe, chain, and carabineers are not implements of crime, no matter how you slice it. Regardless, you should have a group ready to provide immediate legal support.

Committing to a lockdown is a serious matter; you must be prepared for the ordeal of interacting with infuriated police officers over a protracted period of time, while being unable to move freely; this will be followed by the further ordeal of being arrested and spending time in jail. Embark on a lockdown in a state of inner peace and resolve, properly fed and hydrated, prepared to weather storms of danger and drama—and if you think you might be there for a long time, wear an adult diaper!

A Note from History Is A Weapon: Our favorite lock boxes were PVC pipe, rolled in tar, then rolled in a mess of pebbles and nails, then wrapped in chicken wire, then given a double of duct tape. These were unstoppable and fun to make for the group. We also strongly recommend the middle bolt with the carabiner chain with socks around the wrist. Good luck.