

# **The ELF/ALF Arrests**

## **The Issues They Present for Environmental Activists**

H. Read

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On December 7, the sudden arrest of six individuals rocked the activist community. All were accused of arsons claimed by the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and/or Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Since then, the cases have taken many twists and turns: one of those arrested died in custody in an apparent suicide; six more activists were indicted (although three have not been apprehended); then, on January 20, a 65-count indictment against the remaining 11 arrestees blamed them for every major ELF action between 1996 and 2001, with a trial set for October 31. In February, two more activists were arrested and charged with some of the same arsons in Oregon.

According to the FBI, the arrests were part of "Operation Backfire," a project to dismantle the underground eco-saboteur network. Until now, no one had been arrested for major ELF arsons, such as the burning of an under-construction sky resort in Vail, Colorado. Most observers agree that the ELF lacks formal structure; any person who abides by ELF guidelines may use the name.

Other recent actions against activists include: the arrest of three people in Auburn, California for a separate ELF action; another bust of long-time ALF spokesman Rod Coronado; and the continued attempts to extradite Tre Arrow from Canada to face U.S. arson charges. Also ongoing are grand juries in San Francisco and Eugene focusing on animal rights and environmental activists and the recent convictions of the SHAC7 for violating the new Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act.

### **Informants Play A Role**

Significant differences exist between the 12 people who have been indicted. Bill Rodgers died in custody on December 22, reportedly of a suicide. Joseph Dibee, Rebecca Rubin and Josephine Overaker have been indicted but are not in custody; federal officials claim they are out of the country. Kevin Tubbs, Stanislas Gregory Meyerhoff, and Sarah Harvey are reportedly "co-operating" with officials in the investigation. Prisoner support groups have withdrawn support for all three.

Harvey is out on bail; so are Jonathan Paul, Suzanne Savoie, and Daniel McGowan. McGowan had been previously refused bail in New York City and was extradited to Oregon, but was the first to be released there; Jonathan Paul and Suzanne Savoie had been summoned to appear before the Eugene grand jury, but were arrested before appearing.

Particularly disturbing about this case are two informants, who have not received any charges. According to the FBI, Jacob ("Jake the Snake") Ferguson wore a wire and recorded conversations with several of the defendants; McGowan was initially denied bail on the basis of a taped conversation with Ferguson.

What this trial will mean to the larger activist milieu is still uncertain. The FBI has declared ELF and ALF groups to be the number one domestic terrorist threat. After September 11, industries targeted by the ALF and ELF suc-

cessfully pushed federal agencies to prioritize focus on those engaged in economic sabotage—in effect, making the federal government their free security company and investigators.

The FBI has also publicly declared the arsons to be terrorism, despite the fact that no humans have ever been harmed in ELF acts. Widespread support for their actions among environmentalists, progressive activists, and even the public-at-large has infuriated government officials and industry bureaucrats, and undoubtedly, intensified focus on the ELF.

## **What Support Obligations Do We Have?**

These arrests pose problematic questions for the larger community. Activists will have a range of relationships to these actions. Many of us, for example, would never publicly advocate ELF-style actions, although privately, they are a source of glee.

Nonetheless, consider the following three good reasons to support these people, even those accused of actions that we ourselves may not advocate:

- \* Although some of those arrested have apparently admitted guilt, others have not and some are proclaiming innocence. At least two activists (Connor Cash and Josh Connole) arrested in the past and charged with ELF actions were later exonerated.

Take the disconcerting case of Daniel McGowan. A high-profile public activist in New York City, McGowan does defense work for Jeffrey Luers, an environmental activist serving a 22-year sentence for burning three SUVs in Eugene. Are those doing jail support for imprisoned environmental saboteurs being targeted by the government and then accused themselves of “terrorism?”

- \* All of those charged are facing excessive jail sentences (up to life in prison). Many studies have shown that radical left and anarchist activists receive far stiffer sentences than those given to non-political offenders or right-wing activists.

The threat of far-ranging indictments and long sentences indicate clear attempts to suppress the radical environmental movement in general.

- \* If the federal government successfully labels economic sabotage as “terrorism” and makes that claim stick in court, this will encourage federal agents to extend the “War on Terror” into an even more extensive war against the environmental and animal rights movement.

For more information and updates: [fbwitchhunt.org](http://fbwitchhunt.org) and [ecoprisoners.org](http://ecoprisoners.org).



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