

Activist guide on mobile phones

Important to know about mobile phones

Your mobile phone contains data with, among other things, your location, search log, contacts and messaging content. This is sensitive data that the police can use as evidence against you and your friends in court. It's not just your own privacy and security at stake if your phone's taken, but also that of your friends! The police have confiscated smartphones several times and are quite capable of doing it again. We'd like to keep them out of the loop! The information below will help you make your phone more secure.

Smartphone that is: if you've got a dumbphone there's not much that can be done to secure it, so please don't use it for confidential messaging.

Planning an action

Encrypting

A good place to start is to use an encrypted messaging services and encrypt your phone. Just doing that makes a big difference.

It's actually quite easy for the police to access phone calls, SMS's, read them, see who you are writing to and where you're at; even if they don't have your phone. By switching to an encrypted messaging service such as Signal, you can write privately without anyone taking a peek. But that won't work if the police confiscate your mobile and crack your lock screen password. You must ALWAYS remember to delete the Signal app before an action.

To make it harder to crack your password, you can encrypt your device. That's done in "settings" and takes a few hours. Each time you power off your mobile, all information will be encrypted and when you restart it you'll need to enter a password which will then decrypt it all once more. It's important to power off before each action!

Don't use finger or facial recognition

If you use finger or facial recognition to open your phone, the police can easily access it. If you won't voluntarily open it, they can legally force you to do so. You'll need to have a different password and it should be a strong one. A text code is the best password but numbers can work too - by the way, make sure it's not easy to guess.

Drop online communication

The best thing you can do for your online security regarding the police is to reduce your online footprint in the first place. Meet at a café, leave the phone at home and plan the action in person.

Try not to write anything about the action online, especially if you're worried that the cops will be interested. If there's no evidence to dig up, you can sleep safely at night.

Put the phones away

The police can get access to your phone and its microphone and monitor everything you say around it. It is expensive and difficult for them but they can do it and the company that produced your phone can too. To reduce the risks of being surveilled it is advised to plan actions without electronic devices around.

It is also a good idea to make sure other people are okay with it, and inform them, if you approach them with a phone in your pocket.

For the action

Leave your phone at home!

So simple BUT so easily forgotten. There've been many actions in which activists have had their phones with them and brought them home safely, but the situation can escalate and suddenly you've lost your primary connection to the world and have given the police an opportunity to gather lots of evidence against you and your friends.

If you really need a phone during an action, to keep in contact with the others, livestream or take pictures, you should use a burner phone or an action phone. A burner or an action phone is one you only use at an action and is completely clean for other data. It doesn't matter if the police confiscate it, because there won't be any sensitive data on it. You can use an old, factory-restarted mobile as a burner.

If you suspect your home might be ransacked

The Police rarely choose to search the homes of activists in connection with their arrest and so far, it's only occurred a few times in connection with actions of high legal risk (permanent painting on buildings, etc. or IT cases), but then you never know what the police will do.

It's a good idea to make sure your home is police-friendly before taking action. Burn your notes, delete Signal and get your calendar, computer, phone and other devices out of the way. A hiding place in another room can be fine but in some cases the police will choose to search the entire house. They can search one's home without at first obtaining a judge's order if it's deemed necessary to do so immediately. But you can always demand a trial afterwards and we recommend that you do so!

If it's decided that you were subjected to an illegal search or that you will later be acquitted, you can receive a large sum by compensation. We recommend you donate all compensation in solidarity with the activist network BødeBanken.