



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Environmental Activists prevent construction of coal-fired power plant in Kingsnorth, England, 2007-2010

*Time period notes: Actions simmered out slowly over the last two segments; they ultimately won the campaign in October of 2010.*

April

2007

to: October

2010

**Country:** England

**Location City/State/Province:** Kent

**Location Description:** Various parts of the country, focused on a coal plant in Kingsnorth

**Goals:**

To prevent the construction of a coal-fired plant at Kingsnorth.

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Activists delivered a giant transparent postcard filled with coal.
- 026. Paint as protest › Activists painted a slogan on the outside of a coal stack
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › Protestors chained themselves to conveyer belts
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › climbed to the top of a coal stack, prepared to stay there for a few days

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 023. Destruction of own property
- 032. Taunting officials › referred to as a laugh-in
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › Protestors erected fences and then chained themselves to them

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 001. Public speeches

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › website and "Google-bombing"
- 016. Picketing
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 030. Rude gestures
- 034. Vigils
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 160. Reverse trial
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 034. Vigils
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Human chain
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 173. Nonviolent occupation › took over a concrete island

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:**

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Environment

**Group characterization:**

- Largely British volunteers
- employees of an environmental organization

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Greenpeace

**Partners:**

Stop Climate Chaos Coalition

**External allies:**

Oxfam, Women's Institute

**Involvement of social elites:**

Director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies Dr. James Hansen, England's Prince Charles, Greenland Inuit

Aqqaluk Lynge

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Dr. Hansen
- Prince Charles (joined and exited)

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Aqqaluk Lynge (joined and exited)
- Crew of the Rainbow Warrior
- Dr. Hansen (exited)
- Oxfam
- Stop Climate Chaos
- Women's Institute

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 7 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

German Energy Company Eon, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Energy Secretary John Hutton

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not known

**Repressive Violence:**

Arrests

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

5 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Although at the time of writing it looks almost certain that Eon will not build the proposed plant, it is still possible that they will revive the proposal at some point in the future, and that the success will have been only a temporary one.

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In December of 2006, Eon, an energy company, submitted an application to the Medway council in Kent, England to build coal-fired generating units, the first to be built in England since 1974. The plant would emit more carbon dioxide than the world's thirty lowest emitting countries combined. Within a few months, two other companies were proposing similar projects, with even more to follow. Eon planned to implement Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), as per the government's request. With CCS, the coal plant separates out the carbon dioxide and stores it under the sea, rather than releasing it into the atmosphere. However, CCS is very expensive and the technology was not fully developed at the time—indeed, no commercially operating plants had CCS, nor did it seem like they could for several decades. Opposition organizations maintained that the new plant would not actually implement this technology, and that it would instead be just as destructive as previous coal plants.

Greenpeace, an environmental advocacy group, immediately responded in opposition to the project and the reemergence of coal as fuel in general across England, demanding efficient and renewable energy, particularly decentralized energy. In late spring and summer of 2007, 13,000 Greenpeace supporters wrote to the planning officer at Medway Council asking him to deny the application. Greenpeace delivered the letters in September, along with a giant transparent “postcard” filled with coal.

On October 8, 2007, between 26 and 60 Greenpeace volunteers split into teams and took over the existing coal plant in Kingsnorth, where the new plant would be built, around 5:00 am. One team stopped the conveyor belts transporting coal into the plant and then chained themselves to the machines and conveyor belts so that the company could not restart them. This meant that once the plant used up the coal in its boilers, it would stop emitting energy—it usually emitted 20,000 tons of carbon dioxide daily. Another team, later named the “Kingsnorth Six” made a nine hour climb up the 200-meter tall chimney, planning to hold it for several days in order to remove it from the National Grid and to paint a message in 10-meter high letters on the outside of the chimney telling Prime Minister Gordon Brown not to approve Eon's proposal; the specific words were to be “Gordon Bin It.” Over the course of that day, police began arresting those chained to the machinery, arresting most of them by the end of the day. Meanwhile, the other six spent the night on the top of the coal stack and descended the next day. Police arrested them on their arrival on the ground, but released all the protesters after no more than one night in jail.

In December of 2007, Dr. James Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, wrote a letter to Prime Minister Brown urging him not to approve the plant. In a later interview, he said that not only should England not approve any new coal-fired plants, it must begin to destroy the ones already operating. Dr. Hansen emphasized that Brown's decision had great implications for the future of the planet, and that the world's more polluting nations had to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Dr. Hansen also spoke on British radio a few weeks later, delivering a similarly brutal attack to the coal proposition. This statement on behalf of Greenpeace's cause came approximately a year after former United States Vice President and Nobel Peace Prize Winner Al Gore declared that climate change was at such a crisis point that activists should be standing in rings around bulldozers to prevent the construction of new coal plants. Although he did not explicitly endorse the Greenpeace activists, the organization nevertheless took his statement as a powerful message in support of their cause and tactics. In February of 2008, England's Prince Charles also came out against the interests of coal, urging the government to deny Eon's request.

In November of 2007, Medway Council postponed the decision on Eon's proposal for a later date, and then on January 2, 2008, approved the proposal, leaving the final decision up to Prime Minister Brown and Energy Secretary John Hutton. In January of 2008, Eon wrote to UK officials saying that CCS would not work, and requesting permission to build a conventional plant instead. The Department of Business granted their request. In response, Greenpeace lawyers wrote to energy minister John Hutton asking for a public inquiry on the matter, and saying that the government would be unable to review the application impartially.

On February 6, Greenpeace activists blocked four of the five entrances to the annual coal conference at Lord's cricket grounds. They set up two-meter high fences, and then chained themselves to them, so that the attendees of the conference could not enter.

On April 1, Greenpeace held “Fossil Fool's Day” actions. The London World Development Movement groups organized what they called a “laugh-in” outside Minister of Business John Hutton's place of work. Another ally organization held a protest in Parliament Square, where they set up a coal-fired power station and wore Gordon Brown masks and jester hats. They eventually

burned a fake climate change bill.

In July, Eon sponsored a Guardian Climate Change Summit in London. Activists, wishing to make clear the hypocrisy of sponsoring a climate change event while building a new coal-fired station, protested the action in white jumpsuits, calling themselves "greenwash guerrillas." They held banners and handed out leaflets, and danced to a popular song called "Toxic," to demonstrate what they saw to be the toxic nature of Eon's policies. Later that month, activists from ally organization Stop Climate Chaos planted flags at Kingsnorth to protest the proposed new coal plant. This action occurred just one day after Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee suggested that the government introduce stricter emission standards and forbid the operation of coal-fired plants to continue unabated.

In August, Greenpeace held its climate camp. On August 1, the Climate Camp Caravan began a march from Heathrow Airport in London, a site of previous Greenpeace activism, to Kingsnorth. The camp itself, running from August 4-11, featured workshops and discussions on building a strong climate activism movement, with a focus on impeding the coal rush. These workshops took place in tents the activists had set up near the Kingsnorth plant. Climate campers carried out other actions around the country, focusing on other climate issues, during the first part of August. Those speaking on behalf of the camp later claimed it as a victory, although Eon claimed that the protesters had failed to disrupt any activity. Police occasionally raided the camp and made some arrests, and also had a garrison with horses, dogs, and helicopters outside the camp to search everyone coming through. Police injured a few protesters in an attempt to deny them entry.

The Kingsnorth Six trial started in the beginning of September. On the third day of the trial, NASA's Dr. Hansen gave evidence for the defense, explaining the great damage to property, lives, and the environment that climate change was to cause. The trial featured other expert testimony, such as that of Greenland Inuit Aqqaluk Lyngé, explaining the grave dangers climate change posed, and the necessity of cutting back carbon dioxide emissions before the situation worsened. Such testimony was critical for the defense, which argued that the damage the Kingsnorth Six caused was necessary to prevent the greater damage climate change, and particularly the emissions from the proposed Eon plant, would cause. The jury ultimately found the activists not guilty, due to the immediate need to prevent such damage. This verdict was a very important precedent, as it was the first time the "lawful excuse" defense excused climate activism.

In October, many climate campers traveled to Eon headquarters in Germany to partake in a symbolic action where protesters stood outside raising their middle fingers. That same month, a ship called the Rainbow Warrior came to England to help the campaigners in the fight against Eon. On the 27th, they sailed to the Kingsnorth station, where directors of various organizations joined them to deliver a declaration to Eon staff at the station. The organizations were mixed in purpose—many were part of the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, but others were less explicitly environmental, such as Oxfam and the Women's Institute. Together, the organizations had a combined total of over 4 million members, and they emphasized the strength of their numbers in their declaration. The Rainbow Warrior, along with 8 other boats, sailed up to the power station with flags of the thirty lowest carbon dioxide producing countries. Although police prevented them from entering the plant, they stood on the jetty with their flags and read the expert evidence about the costs of climate change from the Kingsnorth Six trial. Six activists also occupied a small concrete island that Eon owned and projected images of climate change and the message "Gordon Bin It" onto the smokestack.

In December, Lord Turner's committee on Climate Change recommended that, over the course of 15 years, the government close all coal stations without CCS. At the same time, Greenpeace started a "Google Bomb," calling on anyone with a blog or website to put the link to an anti-coal website along with the word "Eon," so that, eventually, anyone Google-searching "Eon" would find the first website to be the anti-coal one. The website quickly rose in position on the Google queue.

In June of 2009, Energy and Climate Change Secretary Ed Miliband created a new coal consultation with three proposals: to mandate CCS in any new plants; to mandate CCS retrofit; and to find alternatives to CCS if it did not become viable by 2020. On June 21, three women swam in the Medway River to block a coal freighter to prevent it from docking at Kingsnorth. Four other campaigners climbed aboard the ship, climbed the foremast, and demanded that the ship turn around. They came down the next day after receiving an injunction. In early July, activists formed a human chain outside the Kingsnorth plant holding yellow

sashes saying "Climate Change Kills."

In October, Eon announced that they would postpone the project for a few years due to the poor financial climate. One year later, in October of 2010, they officially withdrew from the government's competition for funding, leaving just one company left in the competition and almost guaranteeing that Eon would not build the Kingsnorth plant.

## Research Notes

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### Additional Notes:

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### Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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