



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## National campaigners join Massachusetts locals to close Brayton Point coal plant, 2013

17 May

2013

to: 2 September

2013

**Location City/State/Province:** *Somerset, Massachusetts*

### Goals:

To shutdown the Brayton Point Power Station.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › Small lobster boat with crew blocks giant coal cargo ship

### Methods in 2nd segment:

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws › Seek to enter energy plant with symbols of solar and wind energy

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 038. Marches › 60 mile march from coal plant to new wind energy site

### Notes on Methods:

Dates are lacking on variety of rallies and picketing events that are reported.

## Classifications

### Classification:

Defense

### Cluster:

Environment

**Group characterization:**

- Environmentalists and local residents

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

350.org

350 Mass

Summer Heat

**Partners:**

Better Future Project, Students for a Just and Stable Future, Coal Free Massachusetts

**External allies:**

Mothers Out Front, United Church of Christ, Sierra Club, Clean Water Action, other local groups

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- Mothers Out Front
- United Church of Christ

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Some groups had been mobilizing against Brayton Point for many years including Sierra Club and Clean Water Action as well as local resident groups.

**Segment Length:** 2.5 weeks

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Dominion Resources, which sold the plant to Energy Capital Partners.

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

None known.

**Campaigner violence:**

None known.

**Repressive Violence:**

Arrests of people committing civil disobedience

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

### Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

The company claimed that it decided to shut down Brayton Point because it was becoming unprofitable, but acknowledged that profitability is related to environmental regulations. Environmentalists had pressed for heightened regulation for many years and the 2013 campaign escalated the pressure against Brayton Point's emissions; the movement was clearly growing.

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The Brayton Point Power Station, a coal burning power plant in Somerset, Massachusetts, regularly emits mercury, lead, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide into the atmosphere. Brayton Point is one of the largest single sources of pollution in all of New England. Local activists had been fighting the coal plant for a decade when other organizations joined to escalate the struggle.

On 17 May 2013 Ken Ward of Boston and Jay O'Hara of Cape Cod brought their 32-foot former lobster boat to Brayton Point. The men wanted to use their boat to blockade the offloading of 40,000 tons of coal bound for the Brayton Point Power Station.

Supported by a team of fellow activists on the shoreline, Ward and O'Hara parked their boat at the Brayton Energy Plant, alongside the pier in the spot where the coal freighter needed to tie up. By dropping their 200-pound anchor into the water, the intentions of the protesters were clear – they wanted to prevent any ship from mooring to offload coal.

As their anchor hit the ocean floor at about 9:30 am, the 688-foot cargo ship Energy Enterprise was off the coast of Massachusetts headed for Brayton Point. The protesters, along with their boat, the Henry David T, stood ready to face the enormous ship as it came into the harbor at around 11 am.

Before the Energy Enterprise arrived, however, the protesters were met by four Coast Guard vessels. The Coast Guard ordered Ward and O'Hara to pull their anchor. Ward and O'Hara made an attempt to do so, but it was too heavy. Then, the Coast Guard boarded the Henry David T and attempted to pull the anchor themselves. Both attempts failed. Then a dive crew was sent into the harbor and was once again unable to lift the anchor. All the while, the Energy Enterprise stood tethered to the end of the pier unable to moor properly.

Finally around 5:30 pm, a commercial salvage boat was able to hoist the anchor from the water by using a power operated crane. After this occurred, the Henry David T left the berth of the Energy Enterprise and the cargo ship moved into its designated position. On 18 May 2012, the following day, the Energy Enterprise offloaded the 40,000 tons of coal it was carrying.

This first action by environmentalists in Somerset became the catalyst of the “Summer Heat: Close Down Brayton” campaign that would take place over the following months. Ward and O'Hara stimulated activists from all over the East Coast to come to protest the plant's existence. The campaign was supported by national and Massachusetts levels of the climate justice organization 350.org.

The campaigners called for mass action at the end of July. On 27 July citizens gathered in Providence, Rhode Island to undergo a training session in choreographed practice for action, preparation for jail support, affirmation of action agreements and training in nonviolent direct action. Training was mandatory for any protesters willing to risk arrest.

In preparation, leaders of the demonstration contacted police and made them aware of the protest. They informed police that their plan was to march to the plant's gates and to place wind turbines and solar panels in front of Brayton to symbolize the need

to use alternative means of generating electricity. In the conversations with officers, the group made it explicitly clear that the intentions of the group were nonviolent so police were aware of the peaceful intentions of the activists.

On 28 July 400 protesters gathered in a small baseball field located near the power stations two largest cooling towers. For roughly an hour and a half, protesters listened to coal miners, environmentalists and union activists before marching toward the plant.

Dozens of activists walked towards the gates flanked by police. Carrying signs critiquing the plant's harmful operations, the group chanted slogans calling on the governor to close the plant. All members of the group who were prepared to risk arrest wore red shirts to help aid police in differentiating them from other protesters.

As the rally began to near the plant's property, it became clear that they would not be able to reach the gate of the plant itself. A yellow line of tape crossed the path ahead of the marchers indicating where the plant's private property began. The activists ready to risk arrest crossed under the yellow tape in small groups.

Upon crossing the line, police immediately arrested those who trespassed onto the plant's private property. Over 40 arrestees were given a \$100 fine and the arrest was not recorded on their criminal records.

Several of the groups in the coalition then continued the pressure on the Brayton Point plant and linked it with other fossil fuel-using energy plants in Eastern Massachusetts. They organized the "Energy Exodus, a march from Coal to Cape Wind," 28 August – 2 September. The 60 mile march began at Fall River, MA, across the bay from Brayton Point, and in six days an estimated 60 campaigners marched to Barnstable, MA, the future home of the nation's first planned offshore wind farm.

8 October 2013 Energy Capital Partners, the owners of the Somerset plant, announced the shuttering of Brayton Point Power Station. Energy Capital Partners said that using coal to make electricity was no longer competitive with the falling price of natural gas and the cost of meeting stricter environmental rules. They failed to mention that the pressure of the environmentalist movement was responsible for the increasing strictness of emissions regulations.

With the closure of Brayton Point, one of the largest sources of pollution in New England is slated to end as of 2017.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The campaign was heavily influenced by Quaker values, the notion of "bearing witness", the Quaker inspired pacifist voyages of the 1960s and the early Greenpeace actions against US nuclear testing in the pacific.

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