

Category 4, Crisis Communications  
Region: West Midlands  
Entrant: E.ON UK Corporate Press Office

## **Communicating during Climate Camp at Kingsnorth power station**

### **Summary**

In August 2008, campaigners converged on Kingsnorth power station for a week-long environmental demonstration – specifically against E.ON’s plans for a new coal-fired power station on the site.

Action had begun months earlier, in October 2007, when six Greenpeace activists broke into the station and scaled the chimney.

#### Facts

- Protest groups vocal in their intentions – “shut down the power station by land, sea and air”;
- Protestors estimated in the thousands;
- 1,400 police officers’ incl. specialist dog and horse units. Around 100 arrests.

#### Timeline

- **Sunday 27 July**  
Climate Campers meet at Heathrow Airport for march across London
- **Wednesday 30 July**  
Protestors arrive in Kent and set camp
- **Sunday 3 August**  
March from Rochester to Kingsnorth – approx 150 people
- **Saturday 9 August**  
Designated “Day of Mass Action” against Kingsnorth – with stated aim (ultimately unsuccessful) to shut down the station

### **Objectives**

We were under no illusions; Climate Camp would attract huge media attention. We needed to be able respond in a timely, honest and responsible manner if we were to contribute to the debate.

Our top line objectives:

- Safe running of the power station;
- Keep employees across the business informed;
- Protect relationship with the local community;
- Engage with media and ensure coverage was balanced;
- Protect the E.ON brand;
- Educate people about what we were planning and why.

## Planning

The safety and security of workers and the site was paramount but equally was ensuring a balanced debate within the press.

The dates for mass action were set in advance, helping us prepare. Two crucial elements came through E.ON's previously-published 'manifesto', a document developed following the first protests. This detailed our stance on Britain's energy future and provided a platform to lead the debate and comment on issues raised. The second was the establishment of the Climate Camp Steering Group, involving key individuals from the business: operations, legal, security and communications. From this group stemmed all activity around the event.

## Implementation

### Externally

#### Camp organisers

- Series of letters to organisers re Kingsnorth; carbon, cost & security, and safety.

#### Community

- Letters to 9,000+ local residents and businesses;
- Meetings with parish councillors;
- Freephone number and email for locals.

#### Other external stakeholders

- Contact with MPs, Government & industry;
- Letters to trade unions regarding commitment to safety etc;
- Close liaison with communications teams at neighbouring sites, sharing information;
- Contact with contract firms connected to Kingsnorth and the new build project.

### Internal

#### Colleagues and contractors and management

- Site briefings on camp preparations and our position in the debate;
- Business card with practical advice on key issues such as dealing with protestors and media;
- Employee helpline – recorded message on site status during the week;
- Intranet updates to all staff, dedicated security page with regular updates and contact details for further information
- Managers briefing pack with full current update and Frequently Asked Questions
- Local team brief with more specific detail
- Regular updates to all Generation teams and senior management
- Prepared and briefed high-level spokespeople – Chief Executive, Managing Director of Generation and Director of Operations – should they be needed for media interviews.

## Media

- Media given advance filming opportunities and interviews, messaging based on Manifesto;
- Organised Guardian opinion piece with E.ON chief executive, ahead of camp;
- Local community survey on attitudes towards Kingsnorth and energy;
- Established key messages, raising 'big picture' debate around energy in contrast to Climate Camp's one-dimensional issue of climate change:

***We respect the Camp's right to protest as long as it is peaceful and lawful.***

***We believe the UK needs an open and honest debate around how we tackle climate change, keep the lights on and keep energy affordable.***

## Protest week

- Regular media briefings, on and off the record;
- Media centre for journalists throughout;
- Daily weblog for local newspaper highlighting key issues, discussing topics around carbon, cost and security, and profiling individuals from the station.
- Positioned Kingsnorth as a community, not 'just a power station'.

## Standout

It can be difficult to create standout in times of crisis but Climate Camp showed that being prepared (as much as possible) for any eventuality and having the systems, people and messaging in place makes the process easier. While some of the issues surrounding the camp became blurred, our stance was consistent.

Climate Camp provided a platform to discuss the Manifesto; explaining who we are, what we do and the reasons why; the issue is bigger than Kingsnorth - we need an open and honest debate.

## Evaluation

### Results

- 127 pieces of broadcast coverage in one week;
- MD of Generation in a live debate with environmental commentator George Monbiot on GMTV sofa
- Live national broadcasts on Saturday including; BBC News 24 (six reports) and Sky News (nine reports);
- Residents felt reassured and informed;
- Media felt informed at all times, strengthening key relationships;
- Brand damage appears minimal.

IpsosMori surveyed 1,002 people after the event. Of those, 48% supported plans for a new, more efficient, Kingsnorth that is 'CCS ready' (20% strongly supported and 12% opposed). When asked if the issue made them more or less favourable to E.ON UK, 84% said it made no difference.

Climate Camp was a huge learning curve. Our evaluation focused on lessons learned and experiences gained than coverage generated. The key was the successful demonstration that communications must sit at the heart of planning – at the highest level. Without it we would not have had any control over the situation and the following events.

Relationships forged with regional and national media and the local community provides a great platform for any future action.

**Since that date:**

Since Climate Camp there have been protests at Kingsnorth and at E.ON UK's HQ in Coventry which have seen the rollout of the same communications platform further adding to the debate.