

Published 12 January 2021





Following the violent takeover of the U.S. Capitol on 06 January 2021, which resulted in the death of five individuals and [numerous media workers](#) being threatened and attacked, The FBI [has warned](#) that armed protests are being planned at all 50 state capitols, with “A Million Militia March” advertised on inauguration day in Washington DC by one extremist group.

HP Risk Management has compiled the following safety checklist to help commissioners and editors consider the risks that journalists and other media workers may be exposed to, as they cover political gatherings, demonstrations, protests and/or rallies in the build up to the Presidential inauguration.

In addition, HP Risk Management’s [COVID-19 Checklist](#) published on 08 April 2020, provides useful information and guidance about minimising the risks from Coronavirus while on assignment.




Journalist Considerations

- Does the journalist(s) have experience of covering protests and crowd events that can turn violent?
- Will the journalist be identifiable as a member of the media?
 -  *Media teams have previously been attacked when identified as journalists. Discretion is advised at all times.*
- Is the identity or ethnicity of the journalist(s) likely to make them a target?
 -  *If individuals are likely to be targeted, consider their positioning and distance from the crowd.*
- Is the journalist fit enough for the assignment?
 -  *Individuals may need to react and move quickly to fast moving events on the ground.*
- Does the journalist suffer from respiratory problems such as asthma, and do they fall into any of the [COVID19 vulnerable categories](#)?
 -  *Physical distancing is unlikely to be adhered to at crowded events. The police may deploy tear gas and use pepper spray as a dispersal method, which will almost certainly lead to exposure to increased levels of Coronavirus droplets around them.*




Safety Considerations


- Have you identified how many and which security forces will be present where you are reporting from?

 *Washington DC is likely to be heavily policed in the build up to and on inauguration day. Be aware that protesters and militant groups may focus their attention on 'softer targets' in state capitals instead.*


- Does the journalist have access to personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks, safety goggles, tear gas respirators and a safety helmet etc? Have they received any training on how to use such equipment?

 *Can journalists wear face masks that 'blend' in with the crowd? Note that journalists covering the attack on the Capitol Building in Washington DC on 06 January 2021 were identified as media workers, and harassed as a result of wearing face masks.*


- Have you discussed what clothing the journalists should wear for the assignment?

 *Wear clothing that allows you to move swiftly; and robust footwear with laces and decent ankle support. Try to avoid loose clothing, political slogans, media branding, military colours/patterns, flammable materials (e.g. nylon), and colours associated with certain groups (e.g. black is associated with ANTIFA).*


- Is there a risk of armed protestors being present? If so, have you considered the use of protective body vests / armour for journalists? A useful guide to body vests and other PPE [can be seen here](#).

 *Firearms were openly carried by demonstrators in the Capitol Building attack on 06 January 2021, and are likely to be carried at future events and protests [according to The FBI](#).*

- If ballistic body armour is not advisable, have you considered other mitigation measures such as positioning, use of covert body armour, and/or employing unarmed safety advisors as 'backwatchers' - who can extract journalists quickly if the need arises?


 *Journalists wearing body armour could be identified as media workers, and therefore more likely to be harassed or attacked as a result. Note that ballistic body armour is heavy and will reduce mobility.*

- Have you discussed what equipment is necessary for the assignment?


 *Take the minimum amount of equipment with you, noting the risk of equipment being targeted and damaged by protesters, [as highlighted in recent protests](#). Consider removing media branding/logos from the equipment.*

Safety Checklist: Covering Demonstrations in the U.S.A.


- Does the journalist have the appropriate accreditation, press passes, or a letter indicating that they work for your organisation?

 *It is recommended that journalists avoid wearing neck lanyards for safety reasons, [as highlighted here](#).*

- Have you considered how journalists will return to base/home after the assignment is complete?

 *Some journalists have found it difficult to order taxis or Ubers after protests, which can leave them stranded in hostile locations.*

- Have you discussed the journalists(s) digital security?

 *Media workers should use number pin locks on their phones rather than facial recognition in case they lose their device(s).*

- Have you recorded the emergency contacts and details of all staff being sent on the assignment?

- Has a check-in procedure been discussed and communicated with all parties concerned?

- Have you identified all local medical facilities and recorded the details?

- Have you discussed the possibility of psychological or trauma-related stress, and the relevant support they can access?

Regularly updated safety mitigation advice regarding the covering of violent protests assignments can be incorporated into risk assessments via our new online platform called RiskPal. [Please get in touch to find out more.](#)

HP Risk Management works with a number of newsrooms and journalist associations, providing on-call risk assessment support, safety advice and training. We continuously support journalists working in high risk and/or challenging environments. If you are interested in our services please contact info@hpriskmanagement.com

Disclaimer: *This document has been prepared by HP Risk Management (herein "HP") and is based on information available at the time of writing. The information contained is advisory in nature and any actions taken by clients or third parties are their own responsibility. HP accepts no liability for any loss (direct or indirect) or damage suffered as a result of reliance on the information provided. While every care has been taken to ensure that the content is useful and accurate, HP gives no guarantees, undertakings or warranties in this regard, and does not accept any legal liability or responsibility for the content or the accuracy of the information provided. Any errors or omissions brought to the attention of HP will be corrected as soon as possible. Any links to external websites or documents referenced should not be taken as an endorsement by HP. We assume no responsibility or liability for content provided via third party websites or any software viruses or harmful materials that they may contain.*