



## IMPACT OF ECO-TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND REGULATORY MEASURES

### IMPACTO DAS ORGANIZAÇÕES ECOTERRORISTAS NO DESENVOLVIMENTO DO DIREITO INTERNACIONAL E DAS MEDIDAS REGULAMENTARES

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The study examines the influence of eco-terrorist organizations on the evolution of international law and legal regulations concerning environmental activism. It explores the connection between eco-terrorist tactics and the development of punitive and preventive environmental legal measures worldwide.

**Methods:** The study employs a qualitative approach, based on historical, behavioral, and comparative analysis. Key data sources include scholarly articles and legal research indexed in Scopus and Web of Science.

**Results:** The study shows that eco-terrorist activity is a catalyst for legal reform worldwide. Initially, incidents prompted reactive laws aimed at punishing offenders. However, these events have increasingly led to proactive regulatory changes, such as tightened environmental protection laws and enhanced governmental oversight of environmental activism.

**Conclusions:** The study concludes that the number of eco-terrorist events globally is





slowly but systematically decreasing. Although it is too early to predict a full decline, violent eco-activist activities are diminishing. Several factors contribute to this reduction, including rising environmental awareness among the public and governments. Stricter legal regulations and the efforts of environmental organizations have significantly influenced the reduction in eco-terrorist actions.

**Keywords:** Eco-terrorism, Animal liberation front, Sea shepherd conservation society, Earth liberation front.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** o estudo examina a influência das organizações ecoterroristas na evolução do Direito Internacional e das regulamentações legais relativas ao ativismo ambiental. Explora a ligação entre as táticas ecoterroristas e o desenvolvimento de medidas legais ambientais punitivas e preventivas a nível mundial.

**Métodos:** o estudo emprega uma abordagem qualitativa, baseada em análises históricas, comportamentais e comparativas. As principais fontes de dados incluem artigos acadêmicos e Pesquisas jurídicas indexadas em Scopus e Web of Science.

**Resultados:** o estudo mostra que a actividade ecoterrorista é um catalisador para a Reforma Jurídica a nível mundial. Inicialmente, os incidentes provocaram leis reativas destinadas a punir os infratores. No entanto, esses eventos têm levado cada vez mais a mudanças regulatórias proativas, como leis de proteção ambiental mais rígidas e maior supervisão governamental do ativismo ambiental.

**Conclusões:** o estudo conclui que o número de eventos ecoterroristas a nível mundial está a diminuir lenta mas sistematicamente. Embora seja demasiado cedo para prever um declínio total, as violentas actividades ecoativistas estão a diminuir. Vários fatores contribuem para esta redução, incluindo o aumento da consciência ambiental entre o público e os governos. As regulamentações legais mais rigorosas e os esforços das organizações ambientais influenciaram significativamente a redução das acções ecoterroristas.

**Palavras-chave:** Ecoterrorismo, Frente de libertação animal, Sociedade de conservação sea shepherd, Frente de libertação da terra.





## 1 INTRODUCTION

Eco-terrorism, also known as environmental terrorism, involves violence by extremist pro-environmental groups and radical individuals. It can be regarded as a subset of the broader phenomenon of terrorism (Khlebushkin et al., 2021; Zelenkov et al., 2021). Organizations and movements prioritizing violent tactics against groups and individuals perceived as threats to the natural environment represent the extreme end of radical environmentalism. Radical environmental leaders view pro-environmental attitudes on a behavioral level as encompassing lawful activities (such as picketing, demonstrations, and counter-demonstrations) and a range of illegal, even criminal, actions, including acts of violent terror (Sapaev et al., 2024).

In (Loadenthal, 2013), the term "eco-terrorism" is defined as illegal, radical methods of pressure applied by environmental defenders (ecologists) on governments and industrialists to achieve specific political goals. The cause of such behavior is the lack of dialogue between the conflicting parties (Joosse, 2014; Zhumagulov et al., 2017). According to L. Buell, eco-terrorism is any criminal activity that leads to the use or threat of violence against people or property for environmental and political reasons (Buell, 2009).

R.K. Smith argues that the term "eco-terrorism" was coined by anti-environmental activist R. Arnold, who understood eco-terrorism as a crime committed in the name of saving nature (Smith, 2008). This interpretation led to hearings in the U.S. Congress and the adoption of laws restricting environmental activists in most U.S. states and other countries (The Specific Definition of Ecoterrorist Organizations in the USA and Russia, 2022). In (Vanderheiden, 2005), eco-terrorism is defined as a broad phenomenon encompassing various forms of violence and sabotage in the name of environmental protection.

Several researchers define eco-terrorism broadly, encompassing environmental destruction by states and organizations aiming to elicit specific behaviors (Aleksanin et al., 2018; Kurbatova & Ivanova, 2020) and crimes committed against companies and governmental institutions (Johnston & Johnston, 2014; Połuszná, 2020). The goal of the latter is to halt or prevent activities believed to harm the environment (Polovchenko, 2021).

We limited our analysis of eco-terrorism to actions by pro-environmental organizations. While extreme instances of eco-terrorism often involve violence to enforce environmental doctrines, they may also include actions that deliberately damage or threaten the natural environment.





Using an ideology centered around protecting the natural environment, eco-terrorists direct their aggression toward state institutions, corporations, enterprises, and individuals (Rzabay et al., 2018). Their tactics include protest actions and civil disobedience (Carson, 2013), road blockades (Cooke, 2013), building seizures (Liddick, 2013), intimidation and threats against researchers conducting animal-based studies (Cherry, 2010), and sabotage (commonly referred to as "ecotage"). Specific actions include equipment destruction, freeing animals used for experiments or bred for fur, planting explosives at biotech companies' headquarters and the homes of their leaders, assaults, and bombings of laboratories (Munro, 2005).

The article aims to characterize the activities of the most prominent eco-terrorist organizations and explore how their actions have influenced international law and regulatory measures.

## 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the specifics of analyzing eco-terrorist organizations, we chose a qualitative research approach. Data were collected from November 30, 2023 to March 30, 2024 by analyzing scientific literature on the research topic.

The following research methods were used: historical – to track the phenomenon of eco-terrorism and the activities of eco-terrorist organizations over many years; behavioral – to analyze the behavior of individuals and groups; and comparative – to show the changes occurring in the ideology and methods of eco-terrorist organizations.

In the first stage, information sources were selected. The research data are presented in articles and reviews published in journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Information was searched using the keywords "eco-terrorism" and "eco-terrorist organization" in English and Russian in the title/abstract/keywords.

In the second stage, we identified the most well-known eco-terrorist organizations based on the analysis of the source base and analyzed their methods and forms of terrorist activity.

## 3 RESULTS

The literature analysis allowed us to identify the most well-known eco-terrorist organizations (Table 1).



**Table 1.** The most well-known eco-terrorist organizations

N o.	Organization	Year of foundation	Methods
1	Animal Liberation Front, ALF	1976	Protests, intimidation, vandalism, eco-sabotage, and diversions (arson) aimed at causing the maximum possible material damage to companies exploiting animals.
2	Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, SCS	1977	Diversions against whalers, sometimes involving ramming whaling ships.
3	Earth First!, EF!	1980	Protests and civil disobedience, eco-sabotage, and diversions (arson, destruction of heavy machinery, dismantling high-voltage lines, etc.).
4	Earth Liberation Front, ELF	1992	Intimidation, vandalism, diversions, and attacks threatening human lives.

Note: Compiled based on the analysis of sources.

#### 4 DISCUSSION

Eco-terrorism was initiated in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the so-called Eco-Raiders, students from the University of Arizona who ravaged construction sites, believing that the work done there violated or even destroyed the original ecosystem of Arizona's desert lands. The Eco-Raiders served as an example and source of inspiration for other eco-anarchist organizations (Bondaroff, 2008).

For instance, the Black Mesa Defense organization was founded in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to support the Navajo people during their protests against the construction of a mine in the Black Mesa Plateau area. In 1969, in San Francisco, Djo Brower, the former executive director of the Sierra Club, America's oldest environmental organization (founded in 1892), founded Friends of the Earth (Sorenson, 2011).

In 1970, two couples, J. and M. Bolen and I. and D. Stowe, left the Sierra Club and formed the committee Don't Raise the Wave: Stop the Bomb, whose primary activity was protesting American nuclear tests on the Aleutian Islands. The following year, in Vancouver, Canada, the committee changed its name to Greenpeace, whose activists, among other things, attempted to prevent nuclear testing, sabotaged whaling activities, defended seals from hunters using their bodies, and prevented the storage of radioactive waste (Spadaro, 2020).

The first truly radical organization to use direct action methods was the Hunt Saboteurs Association (HSA), founded in 1962, which used sabotage as a means of direct action to hinder or stop hunting activities (Schlembach, 2018).



The Animal Liberation Front (ALF), founded in 1976 by former HSA member R. Lee, became the most dangerous eco-terrorist organization. Although the ALF's origins can be traced to the United Kingdom, the organization primarily operated in the United States. ALF's goal was to liberate animals from human oppression. From the outset, this organization adopted a covert nature to employ means and methods incompatible with international law. Actions were carried out to inflict maximum material losses on companies using animals, which would make their production financially unviable. The actions were intended to be so effective that companies using animals would feel threatened and unable to function optimally.

ALF activists described their methods with the phrase "non-violent direct action". In the 1980s, ALF activities were primarily aimed at laboratories conducting animal testing for the food and pharmaceutical industries. Animal rights defenders used various methods of protest, ranging from painting relevant messages on the walls of research laboratories to chaining themselves to trees designated for logging in areas constituting natural animal habitats. Only in a few cases were the police and other services able to arrest those responsible for arson and other acts, which escalated into sabotage. The activists opposed animal experimentation and the large-scale industrial breeding of animals (Schnurer, 2004). The targets of their attacks were primarily laboratories (medical, veterinary, university, or private institutions). The functioning of offices and factories of companies that used the results of such research was also disrupted. Activists also attacked food production and distribution facilities, such as slaughterhouses, farms, fast-food enterprises, etc. The ALF organized actions against zoos, aquariums, circuses, rodeos, shows where animals competed against one another, furriers, veterinarians, abusive animal owners, and people wearing fur (who were, among other things, splattered with paint) (Bailey et al., 2010).

The most common method of action was vandalism: graffiti on walls, breaking windows, covering them with posters bearing hostile messages, or boarding up building doors. Arson and sabotage were equally popular. Both methods allowed for significant damage at a relatively low cost. A simple and effective method was a warning of alleged food poisoning. The need to recall entire batches of food products from the market subjected producers and sellers to enormous financial and reputational losses. Releasing laboratory animals into the wild also became a hallmark of activists.

In the early 1990s, members of the American branch of ALF launched a campaign called Bite Back aimed at the fur industry and supporting research institutions. In June 1991, a fire broke out at the buildings of an experimental mink farm in Oregon. Five days later, the buildings of an animal feed company in Edmonds were set on fire, followed by an arson





attack on a research laboratory owned by the University of Washington. In February 1992, a fire occurred at the mink research center at Michigan State University. This final action led to losses exceeding \$200,000 and the destruction of 32 years of research data. For this act, Coronado was sentenced in early March 1995 to four years and nine months in prison and a fine of \$2 million (Fernandez, 2020). From 1979 to 1993, ALF attacked 63 academic institutions and 21 private research laboratories (with damages estimated at over \$6.5 million) and 76 agri-food enterprises (with damages exceeding \$1.1 million) in the US (Johnston & Johnston, 2014).

In 1977, P. Watson, who had been expelled from Greenpeace's board of directors for views that contradicted the organization's doctrine of non-violence, founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS), which specialized in actions against whalers, sometimes involving ramming whaling vessels (Nagtzaam & Lentini, 2007). Unlike Greenpeace, Watson believed that activists should not limit themselves to peaceful actions but should develop a new strategy based on eco-sabotage activities, as only these could permanently discourage people from destroying nature. According to Watson, respect for life should precede respect for property used to take lives. However, Watson argued that when carrying out direct actions, every possible precaution should be taken to prevent harm to participants. According to the FBI, SSCS was the first organization to engage in sabotage beyond the US, making eco-terrorism a global issue. The organization purchased an ocean-going vessel, and Watson, along with volunteers aboard, interfered with fishermen hunting marine animals (mainly whales, dolphins, and seals). The largest action conducted by this organization was the ramming and sinking of the whaling vessel *Sierra* in Portuguese waters in 1979. The following year, Watson's group sank four more ships and conducted many smaller actions to disrupt Canadian seal hunts. The organization intensified its activities in 1986. That same year, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) announced a moratorium on commercial whaling, yet Japan, South Korea, Norway, and the USSR continued whaling. On November 8, 1986, two SSCS activists broke into a whale processing plant near Reykjavik, destroying equipment valued at about \$1.8 million, and subsequently sank two ships docked there (with damages estimated at around \$2.8 million). Over more than 30 years of activity, the organization conducted numerous acts of sabotage, including sinking ten whaling vessels, damaging several dozen others, and destroying dozens of nets used for fishing. However, no one was killed or seriously injured in these actions (Stuart et al., 2013).

In the summer of 2017, Japan adopted new anti-terrorism regulations in preparation for the 2020 Olympic Games (postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic). The new





law criminalizes the mere presence of eco-activist vessels near whalers. In 2017, Watson announced the organization's decision to cease actions aimed at blocking Japanese whalers. In light of the new regulations, SSCS declared it would stop sending its ships against Japanese whaling vessels. The organization also noted that its ships were being tracked by Japanese military surveillance satellites. Watson concluded that these two factors would affect the effectiveness of the operations conducted by the organization and stated that it could not compete with military technology (Hoek, 2010).

The largest eco-terrorist organization in the US was the group Earth First! (EF!), created in 1980 by proponents of environmental extremism. EF! opposed logging, mineral extraction, road construction, suburban development that harmed the environment, and energy companies. Initially, EF!'s actions were more symbolic and event-driven, such as the demonstration on March 21, 1981 on the bridge over the Colorado River protesting the existence of this structure. Since the end of 1981, in addition to civil disobedience tactics and traditional pickets, the organization began to employ radical methods: arson, destruction of heavy equipment, dismantling of power lines, removal of signs on ski trails, toppling and destruction of billboards, and sabotage, which was the most destructive of the listed actions. For example, the organization set fire to a company's headquarters, damaged power lines near nuclear power plants, and destroyed a helicopter that was spraying herbicides. Sabotage activities were carried out by individuals or small groups (Taylor, 1998).

After 1983, disagreements within the organization led to the emergence of two factions increasingly at odds with each other: the eco-centric faction and the social justice faction. The eco-centric faction consisted mainly of people belonging to the first generation of the organization. They were usually over 30 and from the southwestern US. Most of them had been actively involved in traditional environmental organizations even before the formation of EF! In their view, the main and sole purpose of the organization should be fighting for the benefit of nature as a whole. This struggle had to be waged mainly through sabotage activities. The second faction included younger people (under 20), who joined the organization between 1983 and 1985. Most of them came from the West Coast, primarily from Oregon and California, where they had been actively involved in peace movements and social justice actions. For them, the environmental crisis was one of many global problems that could best be addressed through education. Although they participated in eco-sabotage, they preferred civil disobedience actions. Initially, both factions worked harmoniously with each other, but after 1987, previously hidden ideological and personal animosities became visible, leading most biocentrists to leave EF! This was also facilitated by the creation of a cell by the most radical EF! activists called the Evan Mechem Eco-







Terrorist International Conspiracy (EMETIC) (Covill, 2008).

At the end of May 1989, three founders of the organization, M. Davis, M. Mille, and M. Baker, were detained by the FBI while destroying power lines that supplied electricity from the Palo Verde nuclear power plant in Arizona. The investigation revealed that this act was a rehearsal for simultaneous attacks on nuclear facilities in California, Arizona, and Colorado. Subsequent arrests put an end to the group's activities. In 1990, following a series of arrests and debates over the ethical aspects of eco-sabotage, some EF! members, led by Foreman, left the organization. Those who remained abandoned sabotage actions, believing that educational and advocacy efforts would better serve the cause of environmental protection (Covill, 2008).

The disintegration of EF!'s structure also occurred in the UK. In 1992, during a meeting of members of the British national EF! structures, the organization decided to abandon eco-sabotage tactics and "neither condemn nor endorse" this method of action. Some members, unwilling to abandon eco-sabotage, established the previously mentioned underground organization Earth Liberation Front (ELF) in Brighton. They were inspired by the name ALF, and in September 1993, a close collaboration was established between these two organizations (Joosse, 2012).

In 1993, ELF, like ALF before it, set up structures in the US. Initially, the cooperation between the organizations involved posting information about ELF's activities and ideology on ALF websites. From the mid-1990s, ELF and ALF began to undertake joint actions (Zhumagulov et al., 2017). Among other things, the organization declared the following principles: inflicting the maximum possible economic damage on entities and individuals who benefit from the exploitation and destruction of the natural environment; informing the public about the crimes committed against Earth and all species inhabiting it; and taking all necessary preventive measures to avoid harm to any living creature.

To achieve its goals, ELF chose direct action. Modeled after ALF, ELF employed the same strategy of leaderless action. Supporters of the movement were instructed to act alone or form small groups of two to six people, who had long known each other and shared similar views. They were encouraged to take the initiative and establish cells, which operated independently, occasionally communicating and often unaware of each other's existence. They were to act under different names. The same activists used pseudonyms, which led to suspicions of their affiliation with multiple organizations. Each cell was responsible only for its actions, so after a group disbanded or its members were arrested, it was impossible to contact other groups (Saunders, 2008).

The campaign carried out by ELF from 1999 to 2002 against Huntingdon Life Sciences





(HLS) (Upton, 2012) and its partner companies brought extensive media coverage and political consequences. During the campaign, HLS employees and clients were intimidated; their home addresses and phone numbers were posted online with the label "Wanted for complicity in animal torture!". HLS employees and their families received threatening letters, graffiti was painted on buildings, or they were splashed with red paint, vehicles were destroyed, shipments of feces and dead rodents were sent to employees, the company's CEO B. Cass was brutally attacked with clubs, and small explosive devices were planted. The publication of HLS shareholder lists led to a significant drop in the company's stock price. Banks that financed the company's activities, around 100 companies, and HLS's insurer ended their cooperation.

Eco-terrorist organizations are now moving away from actions causing material damage focusing on non-violent resistance instead (Antonova, 2023). The reduced number of eco-terrorist acts is due to several factors. First, there has been an increase in environmental awareness among the public and governments, achieved with the participation of environmental organizations, including those using violent methods. Stricter legal regulations, including substantial financial penalties imposed on those found guilty of these incidents, have reduced eco-terrorist acts, assuming that offenders are caught, and their criminal acts are proven. In some countries, such as the US, state laws can differ significantly from federal laws when prosecuting eco-terrorist acts. In cases of eco-sabotage directed at oil pipelines, refineries, power plants, power lines, railways, chemical plants, and LNG terminals, the law is uncompromising and treats such cases as ordinary sabotage. However, many other incidents are classified as vandalism. States have enacted laws that impose severe penalties on those responsible for destroying genetically modified crops and livestock farms. The SSCS also received a court injunction to stay away from Japanese whaling ships due to the use of aggressive tactics endangering the lives of sailors, and authorities from Australia, New Zealand, and the US have stated that they will send ships to protect Japanese sailors.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Changes implemented by many countries for nature protection have weakened the message of radical eco-ideology and led to a noticeable decline in eco-terrorist activity. Direct actions are organized without violence or the element of threat. These actions often appear disconnected from reality but enable organizations to gain media coverage and focus maximum public attention on specific issues.





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