

City of London Lobbies Guide

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City of London Lobbies

In general, City of London lobbies have:

- Entrance doors
- Reception desk
- Turnstiles (to get into offices usually via lifts or escalators)
- Seating (sofas or arm chairs and sometimes coffee tables)
- In the smallest lobbies, these elements are close together with a walkway in between. The largest lobbies are on multiple floors with cafés.
- Some companies have their own lobby, but usually multiple companies use the same lobby.

For the lobbies of insurance companies in question, the doors to the street are most often revolving doors. For larger lobbies, there are often several sets of revolving doors to get in. For some lobbies you enter through a double set of automatically-opening sliding doors, potentially allowing more people to pass through at once. Smaller lobbies tend to have swing doors, in one or two cases you must be buzzed through by the receptionist. Buildings almost always have a back entrance, sometimes with a small lobby, a goods entrance or else at least a fire escape.

Some lobbies, especially larger ones, are highly visible from the street with floor-to-ceiling glass all around, others are not visible from the street at all. Even in lobbies belonging to a single company, the company name & logo is often not displayed very obviously. In larger buildings the names of the companies tend to appear in a list on the wall, if at all.

Lobbies have the highest footfall at the start and end of the workday (8-9am & 4-6pm) and also at lunchtime (12-2pm).

Access to Lobbies

When companies are not expecting protests, occupation teams have rarely had any difficulty in getting into lobbies. Sometimes larger buildings have a security guard outside checking IDs and intimidating people that they don't like the look of. The lobby of the Leadenhall Building, for example, can only be accessed via an escalator which often has an ID check at the bottom. The security at the Lloyd's building is much tighter than other buildings. We haven't seen them do bag checks to get into lobbies, presumably this would be seen as too much of an inconvenience to employees.

During the Global Week of Action, companies were well warned of protests. Several buildings hired extra security and in some cases companies were using fencing and strict checking of IDs as employees went in.

Physical Appearance

Some employees aren't always respectful of ID checks and may push past. This leaves security to fall back on crude profiling. Receptionists and others will also react very differently to someone that "looks professional". A confident, if not arrogant, attitude is expected. Smart business attire includes hair, accessories like bags, tattoos and piercings. People outside of typical working age have been called out. A rough fake ID on a lanyard can add an air of legitimacy and they have been successful in creating a moment's confusion to get past security. They can be ordered online for around £6 per card.

Your Right to be in a Lobby

When lobbies are open you are entitled to walk in, however if you don't leave when asked then you are trespassing. This is not a crime, but a civil matter between you and the owner. Police can therefore choose not to get involved, however in the case of City firms they tend to arrive within minutes. Security are allowed to use "reasonable force" to remove you, though security are usually reluctant to do this. If police want to forcibly remove you, in principle, they should consider your fundamental right to peaceful protest and facilitate it for what they consider a "reasonable" length of time. In the case of civil trespass, because it is not a criminal offence, police can only help to remove you in a private capacity.

Criminal offences that police might consider are:

- aggravated trespass (ie. trespass + interfering with lawful activity)
- "besetting" (ie. illegal picketing) under TULRA
- section 3 of public order ("fear for personal safety")
- criminal damage

To reduce the risk of arrest it is therefore important to:

- State (or negotiate) a time that your occupation will end
- Leave a wide path for staff to walk around
- Avoid any perception of intimidation
- Avoid even minor damage (including stickers, for example).

During one early action following these guidelines, police were overheard checking the legality of the situation with the Crown Prosecution Service who said that there was "no case

to answer" meaning that any arrests would not result in a trial. As of early 2024, we understand that this attitude is broadly accepted within the City of London police although it's never possible to guarantee that arrests won't be made without warning.

Occupations in City of London lobbies have lasted for as long as five hours with no arrests. Some lobbies have toilets, but usually building security will close any toilets so as not to give access to these for protesters, so for longer occupations consider wearing nappies. Bear in mind that police may sometimes see nappy-wearing as "unreasonable" behaviour. Lobbies of larger buildings are open 24/7. It has so far been assumed that an overnight occupation would not be allowed but this hasn't been tested.

Characters you may meet

Security/concierge

"Physical" security typically wear hi-viz and most likely work on contract and so are less likely to be ideologically attached to the City. "Concierge" security typically are smartly dressed and most likely on a salary, but employed by the building manager rather than any of the companies that use the offices.

Either type of security might try to physically move you. The law allows the use of "reasonable force" (vaguely defined) to remove someone from your land. However, private security guards need to hold a valid SIA (Security Industry Authority) licence in order to be paid to guard someone else's premises and they still don't have any more legal power than the average civilian. If security touch you, it can be effective to point a phone camera at them, calmly accuse them of assault or (especially for hi-viz security) ask to see their SIA licence. If they don't back off, the use of de-escalation techniques and negotiation via an experienced Protest Liason can be valuable. Security can be heavy handed, they will definitely push people around including knocking an elderly protestor to the ground. Police identified this as assault at the time and said that they would follow up although they never did.

Security may try to "de-escalate" you by sitting down and having a nice conversation about your cause. This can have value, but remember that the insurance company is your target not the building manager.

Security may tell you that you are not allowed to stand somewhere or hand out flyers etc. Remember that, on paper, they have no special legal authority, on the other hand they know that in practice they can knock you over with almost no chance of any consequences. Use your judgement.

Security will definitely throw bags out onto the street including a camera (breaking it). Make sure that each person keeps hold of their belongings throughout.

Security may also try to forcibly pull any banners that you are holding away from you, so if you feel comfortable doing so, it is good to keep a firm grip, and have more than one person holding the banner. They may also attempt to take any leaflets off you by force, or knock them out of your hand, again it is good to keep a firm grip.

Building reception

Staff at the reception desk in the lobby will also generally be employed by the building manager.

It may sometimes be possible to approach the reception desk before being outed as a protestor. Most typically, receptionists will call security once they realize that you are protesting and won't engage any further. However, sympathetic receptionists have listened to protestors and been willing to place calls to named individuals at a target company which puts a burden on them to respond. It is therefore worth preparing a credible request and presenting it in a serious way.

In the most successful cases, occupation teams refused to leave until they got an in-person response to a demand letter from a named individual. This gives reception and security staff an option to pass the problem on to someone else which hopefully becomes quite tempting.

Company reception

Many companies list a phone number on their website. A representative of the company may respond very differently to the building reception. It can be worth a lot to give the company an opportunity to engage with you directly. Being able to speak to a company representative could de-escalate the relationship with building reception.

Employees

Many of the insurance companies we are targeting have hundreds or thousands of employees with a complicated structure.

Many employees will, of course, have a love-hate relationship with their job and the City in general. They may feel intense loyalty to their firm. They may feel sympathy for our cause on some level. Junior employees are more likely to feel disempowered. They may not realize that their company is enabling fossil fuel projects.

Types of insurance company

Insurance of large fossil fuel projects is concentrated in very few companies and these are our primary targets. About 20 primary insurers, also known as underwriters provide around 70% of the insurance for the fossil fuel industry globally. Underwriters often pass on some of their risk to reinsurers, especially for unusual, major events. Six companies provide more than 50% of the global reinsurance capacity.

A few underwriters of fossil fuels also offer insurance to members of the public (car, home, health insurance etc) and therefore care about their public reputation. Other companies still care about their reputation, but in a different way.

Research

It is important to research the companies you are targeting in the building. Make sure that everyone knows the names of the different companies being targeted and has background information on each of those companies. So there should be a research document which has all this information. This helps occupiers be informed when speaking to staff and know who is being targeted and why. It is also helpful to know which floor the companies are in the building.

Prior Meeting & Briefing

- It is generally important to meet before going into a lobby.
- Distribute materials
- Recap the plan and make sure that everyone is comfortable
- Make sure everyone recognizes each other
- Make sure everyone can precisely time their arrival at the lobby

One option for a meeting place before City lobby occupations has been a private space a couple of tube stops away. This can allow for calm and open discussion of the action. Another option is to meet in the City, most often in a café. This has been favoured for occupations at the start of the workday, when occupiers are feeling more confident and organized and when the expected risk of arrest is lower.

Meeting points like cafés that are open to the public have caused some problems, especially when occupiers are disguised in business attire and may not have met in person. Cafés in the City of London can be crowded and noisy making a discrete briefing very difficult. Large groups in cafés can also be conspicuous and may attract the attention of police or insurance workers, especially if they are expecting protests. Outdoor briefings can be preferable depending on the weather.

Occupation Scenarios

Front doors are closed

Security may choose to close the doors to the lobby to minimize your contact with employees. People trying to enter/exit the building will generally be directed via the back way although some may still try to exit via the lobby and encounter the lobby occupiers.

This can be considered a success as employees are disrupted and companies will be forced to acknowledge the protest. On the other hand, the occupiers' opportunity for outreach has been limited. Both front & back entrances are good opportunities for banners and flyers to engage with employees or at least make sure that they know what the protest is about.

Building staff must let lobby occupiers leave at any time, so some of the indoor occupiers may consider leaving to join outdoor outreaches.

Front doors stay open

There will probably be a lot of pressure on security to leave the doors open, especially in lobbies of larger buildings. In some cases security have been successful in isolating occupiers in one section of a large lobby and directing employees elsewhere to minimize contact. If the front doors stay open, security will sometimes do strict ID checks on the way in, sometimes they are a bit half-hearted about it or give up entirely. While ID checks are in place, the resulting queue is a valuable opportunity for engagement. If people are going in without showing ID, then more occupiers could consider going in. There are 20-40 insurance buildings within a few hundred yards of each other, if multiple occupations are happening at the same time, consider organizing a back-up occupation team.

Outside team

An outside team can be an important part of an occupation action for a few reasons:

- **Flyering:** security may direct staff to the back entrance or otherwise do not allow the occupiers to interact with the staff on their way-in, the outside team is there at any entrances to flyer the staff coming in and out.
- **Visuals:** In cases where the occupation is not visual from the street and/or is otherwise not attention-grabbing, the outside team makes it very clear to the street that the building is occupied, or something is going on in there (which is a further embarrassment to the company and good for photos).
- **Media:** If any journalists come and want to interview someone about the occupation, but cannot gain access to the lobby to talk to the occupiers themselves, then the outside crew can provide this.
- **Support:** They are also there as occupier support, usually visible through the glass. In some cases security may attempt to chuck-out the occupiers' belongings to force them out, the outside team is there to take and watch them. They can spot/warn of oncoming police. They are also vitally there to welcome occupiers as they leave, make a fanfair of the departure, and provide emotional support (and directions to a toilet!).

Suggested roles in a lobby occupation team

Company Liason

For the Global Week of Action, demand letters were emailed to a list of possible target companies. Some companies responded to this letter and met with XR asking to be removed as a target. Some occupation teams were able to engage with receptionists and employees at various levels of the target company. Target companies that made announcements in the days following occupations, did so after multiple follow-up interactions occupiers or other campaigners.

Ideally, someone will keep track of these interactions. They could provide a means of contact to the company if they feel comfortable.

Remember that some of these companies have meaningfully responded to lobby occupations.

Protest Liason

This is a key role in the occupation. It will be up to this person to communicate effectively with reception, building management and the police. When occupying a building, the protest liason should immediately inform reception to let them know that it is non-violent and where applicable the duration of the occupation. When liasing with the police it is important to keep all the occupiers regularly updated on these interactions, so they are kept informed.

Live streamer / Photographer

Speakers/Interviewees

Banner holder

Point of contact with simultaneous actions (if any)

Outreach

Samba

Creative/Performance

Media Contact Climbers

To climb onto the tops of doors/ ledges, generally doesn't lead to arrest and can make for great photos.

Occupation Activities

If you are aiming for an occupation of a few hours, or even shorter occupations, it is important to consider what activities occupiers may want to be doing. Longer occupations can be boring and it can be really helpful to pre-plan activities that occupiers could do while inside. It also helps to provide some structure to the occupation. There are many different types of activities that can be used for stop these can include among others:

- **Outreach** - handing out flyers and trying to engage with staff entering or leaving building. Quite often, engaging with staff works best at lunch times when staff are not in a hurry to get to work or go home. Quite often security may try to prevent communication with staff, it is always good to test and push the boundaries of this.
- **Re-generatives circles** - if you during an occupation at certain intervals, possibly every hour, it is good to bring people together to simply give an opportunity for people to say how they are doing, or for other types of sharing. This might include asking people to read out regenerative messages; to share a poem, some prose or even play a game
- **Artwork** - a good and constructive way of filling the time is by getting occupiers to create artwork. This could be as simple as getting them to write messages on pieces of card which can then be placed in a display or held up, all creating a paper chain, or more elaborate types of artwork can also be planned. Artwork is a really good way of disrupting the conventions of the office space and showing staff that we are free to express ourselves in different ways in any space.
- **People's Assemblies** - good to plan this in advance if possible, and to have someone there who has experience of running an assembly. These can be quite simple to run. Good to focus on a relevant topic.
- **Singing/Chanting** - these have been very effective in occupations. Singing or chanting can be considered as disruptive so you will need to assess each occupation in regards to this individually. If you plan on singing, take copies of the songs that you want to sing to distribute between the occupiers. Tends to work better if you sound good! Singing can also raise the spirits of the occupiers so you can always return to it from time to time.

Spaces - how to use the space

All lobbies are arranged differently. Some lobbies will be quite open with minimal furniture and others can have quite a lot of furniture which can break up the space in almost a maze-like fashion.

It is important when carrying out an occupation, particularly at the beginning, to ensure that occupiers are not too dispersed. This can cause a kind of fragmentation of the group and make the occupation slightly chaotic. It is important to make sure that the group sticks together or are in distinct units, do not leave anyone isolated who can then be targeted by security. This can be difficult in lobbies where there is lots of furniture, but is important to keep in mind.

Security may often try to isolate the group to make it difficult to come in to contact with staff. It is always good to push any boundaries set up and not make it too easy for them.

Decision Making

It is important when making any decisions when the occupation is taking place, to involve and consult with the whole group, and arrive at any decisions by consensus. This very much aids group cohesion and is important when being somewhere where people want you to leave. This may mean that decision making can take a long time, but that is absolutely fine. With difficult decisions in longer occupations, it can take a long time to arrive at consensus. When this happens it is good to break out into breakout groups when there are many people involved to discuss, and then feedback to the whole group. If after 45 minutes or thereabouts a consensus has still not been reached, it is good to take regular breaks and then come back to the discussion. Otherwise people will drift off.

If there are people who have objections, it is good to listen to each of them fully to understand their objections.

Suggested materials

- Banners
- Flyers
- Small placards with the company name (optionally with "Boycott" before) or other supporting messaging.
- Copies of a letter with demands for reception and company representatives.
- Other print-outs, talking points, speeches, songs etc.
- Card & pens for handmade signs
- Bust cards
- Fake ID cards