

AN ACTIVIST'S GUIDE TO FREEWAY BANNERING

Freeway bannering is a powerful tool for activists. It's inexpensive, most of the required material is reusable, and it's an effective way to reach thousands, even tens of thousands, of people in a short period of time.

A few general tips:

- Keep messages brief enough to be read and comprehended at 65 mph.
- Go for numbers. Having a crowd of people gathered around the banner—especially when wearing bright safety vests—helps increase visibility.
- Do it safely. Do not suspend signs directly over traffic where they could fall onto the freeway. If there is fencing, hang the sign on the *inside* of the fencing if allowed by local law enforcement.
- Keep letters at least 8 inches tall so they can be easily read.
- Construct banners so that they can survive high winds. Freeway overpasses in particular tend to be windy spots.
- Watch your backdrop. Make sure there is nothing directly behind the banner that could make it hard to read.
- Although this method of making banners makes it possible to change messages reusing materials, keep in mind that it can take several hours to make the change, depending on how many helpers you have—so you may not want to change messages frequently.
- If the police request you to leave, you can either leave or request a ticket. The ticket will give you the opportunity in court to argue that freeway bannering is a free speech issue. Most officers won't give you a ticket, but they may make safety requirements—such as not hanging the banner over the fence or tying the banner to the overpass.
- Be prepared with enough volunteers to hold up the banner on the poles—you'll get more notice and response from traffic if you have people with the banner.
- If it is a windy day, have extra volunteers so that as people get tired, they can be relieved.

How to Make a Freeway Banner

Materials:

- Letter and number templates (Patterns for 16" characters may be found at: www.backbonecampaign.org/media/BannerLetterPatterns.pdf)
- Bright paint for lettering (We use “banner orange” paint—True Value Brand, Acrylic Latex Gloss Enamel. The color formula for one gallon is AX-8 oz-22 shots; KX-22 shots; R-7 oz-2 shots.)
- Tyvek® Home Wrap (white reusable plastic material for letters and numbers) (Available at building supply stores, or check with building contractors who sometimes will give you leftover pieces.) 20–30 feet will suffice for making about 60 large letters.
- Deer fencing 18–24' long (Shade cloth can also be used, but it's more expensive and is not as good in high winds) (Available at garden centers or www.deerbusters.com for about \$129 for 100'.)
- About 30 zip ties (sometimes called tie wraps) (at least 7" long)
- 2" Black plastic PVC pipe (4–6 10-foot lengths)
- Twist ties (Check at garden centers for twist-tie material you can cut to desired length.)

Tools:

- Brush or roller for painting letters
- Scissors—heavy duty
- Ice pick or scribe for punching holes in letters
- Small wire cutters for snipping zip ties
- Drill for making holes in PVC pipe

Making Letter and Number Templates

A few days before cutting the letters, paint the white side of the Tyvek with the orange paint. (In humid conditions, it may take several days to dry thoroughly enough to cut the letters.) DO NOT try to paint the letters after cutting them—it's messy and a waste of paint. (We know, we tried!)

Tip: Paint an extra 5–10 yards of Tyvek, but don't cut it into letters. Then, in the future if you need just a few more letters, the painting is already done.

Create letter and number templates (using a word processor, or the .pdf file listed above) for tracing onto the Tyvek. Make them about 10" high for street level banners or 16" high for freeway overpasses. Make sure the lettering is easy to read. If you don't have a printer that prints 11"x17" sheets, use 8½"x11" paper and take them to a copy shop and print enlarged copies for about 15–20 cents each. You may prefer to trace the paper letters onto cardboard, posterboard, or some other thicker material for easier use and durability. Copy centers usually have cardstock you can copy onto.

Constructing the Banner

Cut the deer fencing 5 feet wide for a three-line banner or 3½-feet wide for a two-line banner and as long as you want it to be. (Anything over 20 feet long could present problems in high winds, so use your judgment.)

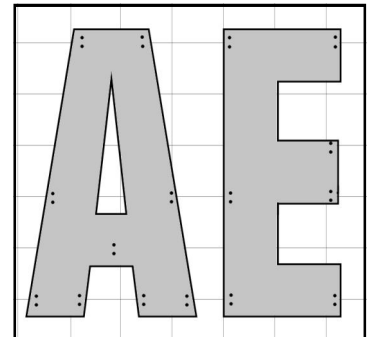
Now it's time for the work party!

Station 1: Cut out the paper templates, if they haven't already been cut.

Station 2: Trace the letters onto the Tyvek using a black marker.

Station 3: Cut the letters out of the Tyvek

Station 4: Cut 6" twist ties—about 10 ties per letter. Use an ice pick or scribe to poke two holes for each tie through the letters, spacing them so they will line up with the horizontal lines of fencing. (See diagram at right.) Pay extra attention to the corners—you don't want the letters flapping around in the wind. This is easier if one person marks the punching positions for the holes and hands off the letters to someone else to punch.



Sample twist tie hole positions with deer fencing in background for positioning.

Station 5: Push the twist ties through the letters so both ends come out of the back. Twist once or twice to keep the tie on the letter when it isn't being used.

Station 6: Lay out the words on the floor. (Check spelling NOW—not after you've attached the letters!) Once you get the letters laid out, attach them to the deer fencing in a couple places with zip ties. When you are sure the words are laid out correctly, twist down the rest of the ties. The quickest and easiest way to attach the letters is to hold the banner upright after the poles are attached (see below) with a person at each end and one person in front of the banner holding the letters, and a person in back to secure the ties in place; OR, if possible, hang the banner from hooks in the ceiling.

Constructing the Banner Poles

Use three vertical poles for banners under 12 feet and five to six poles for banners 12 to 25 feet long. No horizontal poles are required for a banner made of deer fencing. Drill holes all the way through the PVC pipe about every six inches. The ties will then go through the deer fencing and attached to the pipe through the holes.

Once the letters and poles are attached, the banner can be easily rolled up and taken to the site.



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