

Massive police buildup for Pittsburgh G20 summit

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A massive police buildup is well underway in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as thousands of police, National Guard, FBI, secret service and other law enforcement officials flood into the city in preparation for the G20 summit Thursday and Friday.

Sixty police departments from across Pennsylvania and the region have sent officers to the city. Pittsburgh officials have not revealed how many have actually come, but the city said it needed 4,000 police to provide security for the two-day event. Pittsburgh's 900 police officers have been put on 12-hour shifts, and all vacation and leave have been canceled.

In addition to local police, 1,200 Pennsylvania state police and 2,500 National Guard troops have been mobilized and brought into the city.

The White House has declared the summit a National Special Security Event (NSSE), placing security under the control of the US Secret Service. For months, Secret Service agents have been in Pittsburgh planning for the event. Closed circuit television cameras have been placed throughout the city.

A bunker-command center has been set up at an undisclosed location, manned 24 hours a day; agents from the various departments monitor the television screens and coordinate the activities of the law enforcement agencies.

In addition to police, several thousand private security guards have come to the city. Some are providing security for the numerous delegations, while others have been hired by hotels and businesses to provide security.

Pittsburgh has taken on something of the appearance of a city in a war zone. Four-foot-high concrete barriers have been placed in front of most office buildings and on street corners to block off traffic.

Caravans of large black SUVs with tinted windows and unmarked vans race through the city. Groups of 15 to 20 National Guard troops, state police or other agents can be seen getting into and out of vehicles and marching through downtown streets.

Police have set up checkpoints at all entrances into the city, monitoring all traffic coming and going. All kinds of special equipment including armored vehicles have been brought into the city to provide security for the event.

Pittsburgh police have obtained the use of 50 lightweight, high-tech bicycles, equipped with lights, radios and sirens, in

what the department has described as "going green"!

The city's three rivers, two of which intersect at "The Point," have been closed to all river traffic and are being patrolled by the US Coast Guard, as well as state and local police.

The state police and National Guard have taken over the use of some city school buildings, and reopened several that had been closed due to budget cuts, to use for sleeping and meals and as a makeshift hospital; they are also using high school football fields for landing helicopters.

Three security zones

The US Secret Service and the city police have divided downtown Pittsburgh into three security zones.

For those unfamiliar with Pittsburgh's geography, the downtown area forms a triangle, with two rivers—the Allegheny and the Monongehela merging into the Ohio River at "The Point"—making up two sides and a series of highways and hills forming the third.

The green zone encompasses all of downtown and some neighboring communities. There will be only three entry points into downtown, one from each side of the triangle. Most cars and trucks will not be permitted into the green zone. Only buses and taxis, along with emergency vehicles, will be allowed into the downtown area. Trucks making deliveries to downtown businesses will only be permitted to enter from 5 to 7 a.m., and they must have at least two drivers so they are never left unattended. All parking lots will be closed, and cars parked on the streets are being towed.

People who live in the green zone are being urged not to drive, but they will be allowed in if their driver's licenses show they live in the area. Some expect delays entering the city to be as long as three or four hours.

Inside the green zone is the red zone. Here, all streets will be blocked off and only pedestrian traffic will be allowed.

Each day, about 200,000 people commute into downtown Pittsburgh to work and shop. Hundreds of businesses have decided to close down for the two days, and thousands of

workers have been told to either take vacation time or not get paid. Other businesses have decided to remain open, but have moved workers to other locations outside the city. Still others have told workers that it is their responsibility to get to work, including telling some to bring sleeping bags and spend the night in their office.

Inside the green zone is the blue zone, which extends for about three blocks from the David Lawrence Convention Center, the site of the summit. The blue zone is completely fenced off with 10-foot high fences and concrete barriers. People seeking to enter the blue zone will have to pass through metal detectors and then walk down a narrow two-block stretch guarded by police and security agents.

In addition to the downtown area, there will be a massive police presence in the Oakland neighborhood, which houses the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University with more than 50,000 students.

Demonstrations

Only within the last few days have some of the many planned demonstrations been given permits, and then with severe restrictions.

No demonstrations have been permitted to go within blocks of the convention center. One demonstration, which had a permit to march near the convention center this past Sunday prior to the summit, was blocked and rerouted by city police.

The city has set up three “free speech zones,” where protestors will be allowed to assemble. Two are located across the Allegheny River from downtown and blocked from view of the convention center by trees and bridges. The third is located in a parking lot on the northeast side of the convention center. While closer to the convention center than the other two sites, it is separated by a roadway and railroad tracks, making it impossible to be seen from the convention center.

In addition, because of the positioning of the security perimeters, protestors wishing to use this space would first have to march downtown, cross the Allegheny River on the 7th Street bridge, walk up river for nine blocks and then recross the river and march back downtown.

Six groups planning protests, supported by the ACLU and the Center for Constitutional Rights sued the city in federal court. Last week, the judge ruled in the city’s favor in all but one of the cases. The judge called the laborious route to reach the demonstration zones merely an “inconvenience” and declared that considering today’s technology and the number of journalists expected for the summit, the protesters’ message should be able to get out even if they are not seen.

The other major request that the judge denied was a permit for a group called Three Rivers Climate Convergence to set up

camps overnight in a city park located miles from the convention center. The group wanted to hold the tent city to demonstrate the practicality of sustainable living. In the suit, the ACLU cited examples of the city allowing 200 students to camp out to bring attention to the plight of Ugandan child refugees, as well as the use of the park for overnight camping by the Boy Scouts. In this case, the judge arrogantly dismissed the group’s right to free expression, saying it was only seeking cheap accommodations for out-of-town protestors.

The only protest to which the judge granted approval is one being organized by Code Pink, an anti-war group composed primarily of women, which will take place in a small portion of Point State park from Sunday through Tuesday.

Police provocateurs and protests

While most groups have pledged to hold peaceful protests and have sought and obtained permits, last Wednesday, a previously unknown group calling itself the “Pittsburgh G20 Resistance Project” called on its web site for a “People’s Uprising, a Sept. 24 mass march to disrupt the G20 summit.”

The group plans to hold a march from the Lawrenceville neighborhood to the convention center with the aim of stopping the summit. Last summer, similar groups announced plans to disrupt the Republican National Convention. Federal and state agents infiltrated and arrested eight leaders of the group before the opening of the convention. It is entirely possible that provocateurs will be active in the Pittsburgh demonstrations.

Billed as one of the largest demonstrations at the Pittsburgh summit is one being organized by the United Steelworkers of America, Democratic State Senator Jim Ferlo, and the Alliance for Climate Protection. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reports that former Vice President Al Gore may be one of the speakers. The demonstration will present a nationalist and protectionist agenda, aimed particularly against China, in the name of supporting workers’ rights and the environment.



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