

# Priti Patel outlaws dangerous tunnelling protests

Dangerous tunnelling by protesters will be banned under a new law announced by the Home Secretary today (Tuesday 7 June), as the government acts to end the serious disruption and risk to life this guerrilla protest tactic poses.

The digging of make-shift tunnels is one of the most dangerous and costly tactics deployed by groups such as Just Stop Oil and protesters against levelling up projects such as HS2. The removal operation alone following tunnelling by protesters at Small Dean in Buckinghamshire in 2021 added more than £4 million to the cost of HS2.

Filled with lethal levels of carbon monoxide and dioxide, these tunnels can become death traps, not just for those inside them and members of the public, but also for those who are required to undertake rescue operations.

An amendment to the Public Order Bill will make it a criminal offence to cause serious disruption by creating and occupying tunnels, while going equipped to create these tunnels will also be criminalised.

With a proposed new maximum sentence of three years' imprisonment and an unlimited fine, the gravity of the potential impact of tunnelling will be properly recognised for the first time.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel, said:

This country will not be held to ransom by so-called activists unconcerned about putting the lives of others in danger.

These death traps don't just put lives at risk, they divert precious police resources away from where they are needed most.

These measures will give our police the powers they need to crack down on this lawlessness and continue to make our streets safer.

The current offences available are not sufficient to recognise and deal with the scale of danger and disruption caused by tunnelling. This law will empower our police and courts to take action, from arrest through to conviction, against those intent on risking lives.

Another amendment to the Bill will extend the powers to manage public assemblies to the British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence Police.

The Public Order Bill complements the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, recently passed into law, which has increased the penalty for wilfully obstructing a highway and will make public nuisance a statutory offence.