

Climate activists arrested after spray painting UK's Stonehenge monument

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London, June 20 (RHC)-- Two climate protesters were arrested for spraying orange paint on the ancient Stonehenge monument, a prehistoric UNESCO World Heritage Site in southern England, police have said.

The act by Just Stop Oil was quickly condemned by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday as a “disgraceful act of vandalism.” Labour leader Keir Starmer, his main opponent in the election next month, called the group “pathetic” and said the damage was “outrageous.”

The incident came just a day before thousands are expected to gather at the 4,500-year-old stone circle to celebrate the summer solstice – the longest day of the year in the northern hemisphere.

English Heritage, which manages the site, said it was “extremely upsetting” and said curators were investigating the damage. Just Stop Oil said on the social media platform X that the paint was made of cornstarch and would dissolve in the rain.

The Wiltshire Police said the pair of protesters were arrested on suspicion of damaging the monument. “Officers attended the scene and arrested two people on suspicion of damaging the ancient monument,” police said. “Our inquiries are ongoing and we are working closely with English Heritage.”

Footage posted on social media showed activists, wearing “Just Stop Oil” branded T-shirts, spraying a cluster of the megalithic standing stones with the orange substance from a small canister. The group said Niamh Lynch, a 21-year-old student, and Rajan Naidu, 73, had used “orange cornflour” for the stunt.

Stonehenge was built on the flat lands of Salisbury Plain in stages starting 5,000 years ago, with the unique stone circle erected in the late Neolithic period about 2,500 BC.

Some of the stones, the so-called bluestones, are known to have come from southwest Wales, nearly 240 km (150 miles) away, but the origins of others remain a mystery.

Just Stop Oil is one of many groups around Europe that have gained attention – and received criticism – for disrupting sporting events, splashing paint and food on famous works of art and interrupting traffic to draw attention to the global climate crisis.

The group, formed in 2022, said it acted in response to the Labour Party’s recent election manifesto. Labour has said that if it wins the election on July 4, it would not issue further licenses for oil and gas exploration. Just Stop Oil backs the moratorium but said it is not enough.

In a statement, the group said Labour, which is leading in polls and widely expected by pundits and politicians to lead the next government, needs to go further and sign a treaty to phase out fossil fuels by 2030.

“Continuing to burn coal, oil and gas will result in the death of millions,” the group said in a statement. “Failure to commit to defending our communities will mean Just Stop Oil supporters... will join in resistance this summer, if their own governments do not take meaningful action.”

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