

The Charlotte Observer

Protest on construction crane blocks uptown traffic

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Four people were arrested this morning following an aerial protest that shut down several blocks of the uptown Charlotte area for almost two hours.

The incident, which involved hanging a large banner from a construction crane, was a well-coordinated protest organized by a San Francisco-based environmental group. The group was protesting Bank of America, for its alleged support of coal mining companies.

Four people involved in the protest have been charged with trespassing and breaking and entering, according to WCNC-TV, the Observer's news partner.

The protest caused big traffic problems in the uptown area, although traffic is expected to return to normal after 9 a.m. The protesters were connected with the Rainforest Action Network.

The incident happened near the corner of College and Trade streets, at the site where a hotel is under construction. Police originally responded about 6:30 a.m. after reports that two men were stuck in a crane at the construction site. But it became apparent that the incident was not an accident.

Rather, it was a planned protest. The banner hung by the protesters carried the message, "Bank of America, Funding Coal, Killing Communities."

Sam Haswell, an official with the San Francisco-based Rainforest Action Network, told The Observer this morning that the protest was aimed at Bank of America. Haswell said the organization wants Bank of America to stop providing financing for companies that use mountaintop coal-mining removal methods.

"It is a highly destructive method of coal extraction," Haswell said. "Bank of America has invested billions of dollars in companies that practice mountaintop removal in the Appalachian region, including Massey Energy, Arch Coal, and Alpha Natural Resources." Haswell said mountaintop mining, in effect, explodes the top off mountains, leaving the debris to fall into adjacent creek beds, causing pollution.

"Mountaintop removal flattens mountain ranges and transforms healthy mountain woodlands into toxic sludge and rubble that clogs mountain streams," said Rebecca Tarbottom, Charlotte organizer of the protest.

There was no immediate comment from bank officials.

Rainforest Action Network is dedicated to eliminating the United States' dependence on foreign oil. It supports a variety of environmental-related causes.

RAINFOREST ACTION NETWORK NEWS ARTICLE

Due to the protest and the resulting rescue effort, police closed College Street between 5th and 2nd streets. And Trade Street was closed at the College Street intersection. Streets were reopened after the arrests were made, but traffic remained congested afterward.

<http://www.charlotte.com/112/v-print/story/330218.html>