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By **Kathy English**
Public Editor

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It's not every day that reporters and photographers are sent out into the streets of Toronto equipped with helmets and gas masks.

But of course, it's not every day that Toronto plays host to the world's most influential leaders.

Covering this weekend's G20 summit presents unique challenges for the *Star's* journalists and the hundreds of other members of the world's media who have descended on our city.

This is a really big story: "Part showbiz, part politics and part trying to move the world forward," says *Star* editor Michael Cooke. His goal for the *Star's* coverage is to bring readers all aspects of this billion-dollar gathering of global head honchos despite much-heightened secrecy, security and safety risks.

More than 50 *Star* journalists are covering the G20 for the newspaper and website.

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"The biggest challenge is covering something that doesn't have an agenda," says city editor Graham Parley. "At an Olympics, each event is scheduled to the minute so that you know where to be and roughly what is going to happen."

"At the G20, most things are secret and those official events that are announced involve accreditation for journalists. So, if there is an event at the Royal York Hotel, reporters can't just make the short walk from the *Star*. They have to head out to the media centre at Exhibition Place and catch a media shuttle bus to the hotel to ensure everyone is security cleared."

Parley is most concerned with the unscripted events that may occur this weekend — "The protests, the commute, the disruption to normal life. It means having to be flexible and keeping reporters on standby to go where news is

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What will happen in the streets of Toronto when politicians, police and protesters finally converge here after months of planning for the multinational summit is anyone's guess.

As I write this Friday, a sense of nervous anticipation hovers over “Fortress Toronto.” As the *Star's* movie critic Peter Howell so aptly expressed it in his column — it's as if we're living inside a zombie movie: *The Land of the Dead*. The downtown core is under lockdown, fenced in with ugly barbed wire; the streets and sidewalks are eerily

empty but for the hundreds of uniformed police milling about.

As protesters take to the streets this weekend to exercise their democratic right to dissent, will peace prevail? Like the much-threatened gridlock/transit hell that never occurred this week because people avoided the downtown core, is all of this fear of mayhem just so much hype on the part of police, protesters and, to some extent, the media?

Clearly, everyone involved is hoping for the best — but all have prepared for the worst.

That reality was brought home to me last week during a newsroom presentation on “how to get through a protest with minimal pain or injury.” This was surreal stuff for Toronto journalists, the sort of thing you'd expect journalists must know to work in the Middle East, not in Toronto the Good.

A “[protest tip sheet](#)” was compiled by *Star* journalists Jim Rankin and Stuart Laidlaw, based on their experiences covering summits where violence did indeed break out. Some of these tips also come from protesters' own “training camps.” Herewith are some of the more jarring highlights:

- Get a gas mask (the *Star* has purchased several). Keep the mask concealed until needed. People may want to take it from you, and they won't ask politely.
- Don't pick up a detonated tear gas canister with bare hands. They are hot.
- If you get a snoot full of tear gas, you will find yourself on your hands and knees, leaking big time from eyes, nose and mouth. It will be very hard to breathe. You'll feel like you're dying but you'll live.
- Rubber bullets, at close range, will break bones.
- If you are stationed at an active fence demonstration, consider a helmet. Hardcore protesters throw rocks. Keep the helmet concealed until needed.
- How you dress is important. If you look like a protester, you are more likely to be treated as one by riot police. If you don't dress like one, more militant protesters may surmise that you are a member of the mainstream media or police and target you.
- Hide press credentials until you need them. Protesters often don't like the “corporate media.” That said, riot police in the heat of the moment may not care if you are press, even if you happen to be Lloyd Robertson.

Given the potential risks of covering the G20, *Star* journalists have been reminded that “safety is of paramount importance.”

“It's mostly common sense. But in strictly practical terms, reporters, photographers and videographers are more likely to get better stories and images, and get them filed faster, if they are safe, than if they are injured or in a police lock-up,” managing editor Joe Hall said in a newsroom memo.

Clearly, this billion-dollar summit that has brought the world to Toronto is a story like no other. But getting the story at any cost should not be on anyone's agenda.

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