

Graffiti Prevention: Best Practices for Communities

Kansas City, Missouri

Communities are tackling graffiti vandalism with a variety of tools. While each of these best practices can be effective, the most successful programs use a comprehensive, systematic approach that includes continuous education and community involvement, improved technologies for removal, updated ordinances, and consistent enforcement and prosecution.

The Kansas City, Missouri Police Departments Gang Squad investigates graffiti (property crime) within the city. **If you see an act of graffiti vandalism in progress, call 911 immediately.**

Some strategies used by other cities and communities

- Adopted graffiti free streets or areas - Communities are asking volunteers and businesses to help keep areas they have "adopted" graffiti-free. These programs improve awareness and actively engage citizens in graffiti prevention and removal. (City of San Jose)
- Neighborhood paint-outs - Involve neighborhood residents, businesses, schools and others in improving the physical appearance of the area. Working together instills a sense of community pride and responsibility for the future. Graffiti paint-outs are also good family projects because they teach children about the impact of graffiti on the neighborhood and the time and resources spent on graffiti abatement. Paint-outs also give parents a forum to discuss graffiti and vandalism with their children. (City of San Diego)
- Organize a "Graffiti" Business or Block Watch Program
- Print graffiti prevention information on messages on bags, sales flyers, tray liners, book covers, calendars, and other promotional items.

What to do if your property is tagged;

- Remove graffiti immediately after photographing.
- Get an estimate to restore tagged area to original condition
- Prosecute the suspect(s)
- A neighborhood that ignores graffiti is sending a message that indicated apathy or intimidation.

- If graffiti is observed on city owned or other private property, report to the Action Center at 311

There are a variety of effective graffiti removal products for different surfaces available at local hardware and paint stores. Here are some general suggestions, but read the manufacturer's instructions carefully since some products can be toxic. Newer products are biodegradable and less toxic.

- Painted Surfaces (wood, concrete, stucco, etc.): Apply a stain-killing primer or pigmented shellac. This will keep the graffiti from bleeding through fresh paint. Repaint surface with a color that closely matches the original surface.
- Unpainted surfaces (brick, cement, stone etc): Use extra-strength paint remover or graffiti remover. Apply with a wire brush, allow to set, rinse with water.
- Stucco: Use paint remover, wash off with a high-pressure water hose. Or use stucco paint to thoroughly cover graffiti.
- Metal, aluminum siding, fiberglass: Use carburetor cleaner or use paint remover sparingly; rinse carefully.
- Vinyl Siding: use caution because solvents may work too aggressively and remove the vinyl coating. Use paint remover sparingly. Use a clean rag and keep applying the clean dry rag with every light wipe. If the solvent is allowed to stay for even a short period of time, it will penetrate and you may have to repaint. Use primer to match and then matching paint to adhere to the vinyl for restoration.
- Glass, Plexiglas: use carburetor cleaner.

Graffiti can come in many forms:

- Stickers: scrape away as much of the sticker as possible. Use nail polish remover or acetone-based cleaner to remove gummy residue.
- Etching: some graffiti removal contractors offer scratch removal for glass. Look in the Yellow pages under "Glass Plate & Windows" for a contractor to repair glass. Sometimes it is necessary to replace the glass.

Preventing Graffiti:

- Keep your property well maintained.
- Report any suspicious behavior to the police at once. If you see someone about to write graffiti or commit any other crime, dial 911

immediately. You may report anonymous tips about graffiti vandals to TIPS Hotlines 816-474-TIPS (8477).

Protect Your Property:

- Plant clinging vegetation, like ivy, to protect walls and other large flat surfaces.
- Plant thorny or thick bushes or place fences in front of large walls.
- Eliminate anything that could encourage loitering after hours (benches, payphones, etc.).
- Limit access to roofs - move commercial dumpsters away from walls and cover drainpipes to prevent vandals from scaling them.
- When painting your property, consider darker colors that are less attractive to graffiti vandals. Apply a clear coat finish to protect painted and unpainted surfaces and use protective film coverings on windows. **Anti-graffiti paint - polyether modified dimethylpolysiloxane-copolymer – Google - “Anti-graffiti paint” to get companies that sell product.**
- Increase lighting around your property; use motion detectors to draw attention to movement.
- Textured walls are a deterrent to graffiti writers. Consider texturing outside walls if you are a regular victim of graffiti.
- Consider applying a protective coating to provide a barrier between your property's surface and the graffiti. Several different brands and prices are available.
- Businesses use high definition camera to video the outside of your businesses. Can be used to video taggers and other criminals.

Organize:

- There are many advantages when block clubs, neighborhood organizations, and other groups band together to protect their environment:
- Form a neighborhood graffiti removal crew and help those who are not able to do so themselves.
- Get neighborhood businesses to sponsor clean-up and prevention efforts.
- Create a watch force for areas frequently vandalized.
- Involve community youth in removing graffiti.
- Help identify and apprehend graffiti writers involved in graffiti.
- Participate in the city's public property adoption (adopt-a-block) programs.
- Business owners should question teen requests for spray paint purchases! If you are approached by teenagers or your children requesting purchase of spray paint, find out how the paint is being used before your purchase the paint.

Be a good role model. Teach children and youth the following:

- Responsibility and respect for themselves, their environment, and the property of others. They need to know that graffiti on private and public property is illegal and disrespectful.
- Pride in their community. Parents, teachers, and community leaders are needed to help deter graffiti writers. For graffiti writers, including some youth, graffiti becomes a way of life with its own code of conduct, jargon, and aesthetic standards. Tagging is known to lead to shoplifting and other crimes.

More facts about graffiti:

- Graffiti is vandalism! Graffiti is a crime!
- Graffiti - the plural of the Italian word "graffito" - simply means words or drawings scratched or scribbled on a wall. The word is derived from the Greek term "graphein," meaning, "To write." Today, the term graffiti is used if it appears on property without permission. The term originated in the late 1960's although unsolicited markings have been around forever. Each year, millions of dollars are spent cleaning up graffiti from neighborhoods across the country.
- Some consider graffiti art. However, defacing public or private property is not a form of accepted art.
- Graffiti lowers neighborhood appeal, lowers property values, drives away prospective homebuyers, attracts prostitution, and can lead to other criminal activity such as drug dealing and shoplifting in the area. Paying attention to smaller quality-of-life issues, such as graffiti, pays big dividends and can prevent the downward slide of society.

There are four types of graffiti: - tagger, gang, hate and generic. The most difficult types of graffiti to deal with are acid etchings because surface restoration can be expensive.

- **Gang:** gang graffiti is dangerous. Graffiti is how gangs identify "turf". This type of graffiti may spell out a gang name, their geographic area, or a numeric identifier. It can sometimes show an entire list of gang nicknames called a "roll call" or "roster." Gang graffiti serves several purposes, all of which is understood by other "gang bangers," even members of rival sets. Graffiti has been called the newspaper or bulletin boards for gangs, and communicates many messages, including violent challenges, warnings, and pronouncements of deeds accomplished or about to occur. Numbers also have significant meanings to gang members. The number 187 is frequently used in gang graffiti around the United States, and represents

the number of the California Penal Code for homicide. Graffiti which includes 187 is literally making a death threat. For Hispanic gangs from southern California, the number 13 (often written on the streets as XIII), represents the fact that these gangs are *Surenos* (southerners). The number 13 represents the letter M, (M is the 13th letter of the alphabet), short for "Eme," or the *Mexican Mafia*. Gangs from northern California, called *Nortenos*, may use the number 14 (XIV), which stands for N, the 14th letter of the alphabet.

- **Tagger:** Tagger is the most prevalent in Kansas City. Tagger graffiti vandals like to be called "graffiti writers". Graffiti is a culture or a way of life for most graffiti writers. Graffiti writers gain recognition and status from their peers by placing distinctive "tags or graffiti monikers" in as many places as possible, in the most high-risk places, and by how artistic the graffiti is. The intent is for other graffiti writers to see the graffiti.
- **Hate:** This type of graffiti expresses messages of hate against some members or groups within a community. Quite often, these are either expressed in symbols, or in short messages putting down someone's race, religion or ethnicity.
- **Generic:** Generic graffiti is usually innocent in nature, yet carries the same expensive price tag for removal. Often expressions of love (Johnny loves Suzy), school name/year of graduation (Central High, Class of 2008). Defacing public and private property with unauthorized markings also fall within this category.