

Stop graffiti vandalism

Fact sheet 2: Understanding your local graffiti vandalism problem

Introduction

The most appropriate graffiti strategy for your local area will depend on the nature of the problem. The graffiti vandalism problem can be influenced by factors such as the amount and spread of graffiti, the type of graffiti vandalism, demographics of offenders and the type of property targeted. This fact sheet will provide you with information to allow you to examine your local context in detail. This should help you to decide on strategies that will be the most effective and cost efficient. Collecting this information also provides you with detailed baseline data to use in your project evaluation.

TYPES OF GRAFFITI VANDALISM

Tags

A tag is the writer's signature. Written in one colour, it is done with curves and letter deformations. Tags are not confined to spray paint, they may be written in marker pens or etched on glass.

Throw-ups

A throw-up is usually writing with solid or bubble style lettering. It is similar to a tag in that it showcases the writer's 'signature'.

Pieces

Short for the word masterpiece, pieces are large-scale, multi-coloured features, which may include characters, backgrounds and letters. Pieces are intended to be complete art works and are most often done with spray paint.

Bombing

Tags, throw ups and pieces are done in a spree. As much as possible is done as quickly as possible.

Etching

There are two types of etching graffiti vandalism. The first, acid etching involves graffiti using paints containing acid or other chemicals that can eat into the surface. The paints are those primarily used to create frosted glass. The second is "Dutch" graffiti which involves scratching graffiti into the surface with a sharpened tool or object.

HOW TO GET INFORMATION

Conduct a graffiti audit

Graffiti Audits provide information on a range of aspects of graffiti vandalism including:

- How much graffiti vandalism there is in a certain area in square metres;
- Whether graffiti vandalism is prolific in particular locations, called hotspots;
- Type of graffiti vandalism (eg. tags, throw-ups or etchings);
- The number of each type of graffiti vandalism (eg. tags, throw-ups or etchings);
- The number of different tags to indicate the number of individuals involved in graffiti vandalism;
- Surfaces which are particularly vulnerable;
- Types of property which are particularly vulnerable (eg. residential, commercial, government, open space);
- Graffiti tool or material such as spray paint or marker pen.

If audits are repeated at regular intervals then information on trends and other changes over time can also be measured.

When this information is combined with data on removal costs then the cost to the community to repair graffiti vandalism can be estimated.



Graffiti audits should be properly planned so that all information can be adequately captured and, to be comparable over time, should cover the same geographical area and be completed in a consistent manner.

Obtain police data

Police data is available to local councils in a number of different forms, and from two main locations. Each Police Local Area Command keeps data for their geographic area, while the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research organises data according to Local Government Areas which may be more useful. The types of information local councils can obtain from these sources include:

- The number of reported offences;
- The number of 'Persons Of Interest';
- The number of legal actions taken in relation to graffiti vandals;
- Comparisons of your area to other areas;
- The time of day and day of week when most offences occur;
- Information on whether people who offend in your local area also live locally and possibly other demographic details (eg. age, gender);
- Trends over time of most of the above data.

One important factor to note regarding police data is that it only includes incidences of graffiti vandalism that have been reported to NSW Police. For a more comprehensive analysis of your local graffiti vandalism problem, councils should also consider anecdotal information provided from other localised sources as set out below.

Seek data from Local Government, State Government and other property owners

Councils, government departments and agencies, and utility providers often own or are responsible for large amounts of property. Areas such as roads, public transport, parks and reserves, educational premises and car parks can be victimised by graffiti vandalism.

Every agency is different, but the types of information they may keep include:

- The amount spent on graffiti vandalism removal;

- The types of property that council removes graffiti vandalism from;
- The extent of graffiti vandalism on council property;
- The most prolific tags;
- Hotspot locations;
- Current and past projects to prevent graffiti vandalism and the level of success of those projects.

Hold consultations

As most graffiti vandalism is not reported to police, consultation can be an effective method of obtaining data not available anywhere else. Conducting a survey of local residents could help you to further define the graffiti vandalism problem, ascertain what priority the community places on its prevention and engage local residents in planned projects.

Discussions with young people or local youth workers may enable you to discover the motivations of graffiti vandals, the places where they obtain spray paint cans, how graffiti vandals get from their home to the graffiti site and the impact of peer pressure and parental involvement.

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once you have gathered all the relevant information you will need to analyse it to discover the hardest hit areas, the most active times and prolific offenders. This information will help you to design the most effective prevention strategies. You may want to reduce graffiti vandalism in a particular location by reducing access at vulnerable times, or applying Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to the most vulnerable surfaces. You may also address access to graffiti tools through working with retailers who experience high levels of theft or who continue to sell spray cans to people under 18 years of age. If your research reveals that offenders commit graffiti vandalism offences to get recognition for their tags, then rapid removal would reduce these motivations.

Once you have identified what your local graffiti vandalism problem is, information on strategies aimed at reducing the incidence of graffiti vandalism can be found in *Fact sheet 4: Situational methods to prevent graffiti vandalism*.



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