

peer recognition, lack of artistic and recreational alternatives, the element of danger, and lack of appropriate parental supervision and discipline.

### Gang vs. Tagger Graffiti

*Gang graffiti* is usually limited to a specific home turf claimed by the gang. It is primarily used as a warning to other gangsters to stay out of their territory. Gang graffiti is also used to boast of crimes committed or weapons carried by the members.

Graffiti does not mean that gangs are in your neighborhood! The vast majority of graffiti in San Diego is written by "taggers." A tagger writes his or her nickname ("tag") so that it will be seen by his or her peers. Taggers vandalize all parts of the City, and are not necessarily tied to a specific neighborhood. Taggers are usually part of a group called a "crew." Tags can be recognized by their particular style, which consists only of the tagger and/or crew name. Tag names are typically one short word, like "BUSTER," and crew names are usually three or four initials, such as "RIP." Taggers thrive on placing their tag names on as many and as dangerous places as possible. The objective of tagging is peer recognition: the tagger gains more notoriety the longer the tag is "up." (That's why immediate abatement is so important: quick removal of graffiti discourages more tagging).

In some parts of the country, taggers have started to mimic gangs by becoming increasingly violent. Besides stealing most of the materials they use to tag (it is illegal to sell spray paint to minors), many vandals have started to carry weapons to protect themselves from gangs or rival tagging crews. This alarming new phenomenon is called "tag-banging," and while it is widespread in some cities, it is not yet common in San Diego.-



## Crime and Punishment

Graffiti vandalism is a crime and violators can be severely punished. Vandals may be sentenced to up to six months in a correctional facility, be required to perform community service, pay as much as \$1,000 in fines, make restitution to the victimized property owner for the amount of the damage, and/or attend educational classes. In addition, juveniles may lose their drivers licenses or have their driving privileges deferred. Parents of taggers may also be ordered to pay fines and restitution and attend educational classes or participate in community service with their juvenile.

Children must be taught that graffiti is not a symbol of artistic achievement, but criminal damage to others' property when done without permission. Parents need to be aware of their children's activities to ensure they are not involved in graffiti vandalism.

### Note to Retailers

Remember, the sale of spray paint to minors is illegal. The City of San Diego's Responsible Retailer Program encourages retailers to keep spray paint and graffiti tools locked up or in areas that are only accessible with store-keeper assistance. For more information on the Responsible Retailer Program, call the Graffiti Control Program at **(619) 525-8522**.



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO



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[www.sandiego.gov/graffiti](http://www.sandiego.gov/graffiti)

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City of San Diego



# Graffiti Control Program

*"America's Cleanest Neighborhoods"*



Neighborhood Code Compliance Division

*The Neighborhood Code Compliance Control Program was established in 1990 to combat graffiti in San Diego. The prevention and control of graffiti vandalism is not a maintenance issue, but a complex social problem with no easy solution. It takes time, resources, determination and understanding to solve this problem. And, it takes all of us working together on graffiti eradication and enforcement of anti-graffiti laws.*

## What is Graffiti?

Graffiti consists of inscriptions, slogans and symbols scratched, scribbled or painted on a wall or other public or private surface. The word "graffiti" is derived from the Latin word "graphium," which means "to write." The term "graffiti" was originally used by archaeologists to describe drawings and writings found on the walls of buildings and monuments in Pompeii, Egypt and Roman Catacombs. Historically, graffiti may have been used to depict current events. Today, graffiti is associated with urban decay. It has become everyone's eyesore and generates fear of neighborhood crime and vandalism. It is costly, destructive, lowers property values and sends a message that people of the community are not concerned about the appearance of their neighborhood. Graffiti is not art; it is vandalism. It is prohibited when done without permission of the property owner. City ordinance requires that property owners remove graffiti from walls, buildings, fences, signs and other structures on surfaces visible from the public right-of-way. In San Diego, graffiti also includes stickers and tags glued or pasted on surfaces.

## Graffiti: The Problem

The City of San Diego spends over a million dollars each year on graffiti abatement, education and enforcement. This amount does not include the millions more spent by other public agencies, utility companies and private property owners to remove graffiti from their properties. Nationwide, the American public spends nearly twelve billion dollars each year to fight graffiti. Children and young adults become involved in graffiti vandalism for a number of reasons: gang as-

## Graffiti: Stopping the Destruction

Law enforcement, education and prevention, and quick abatement are the keys to eradicating the graffiti problem.

### How to Spot a Tagger

Tag names may be written on the underside of the bill of a baseball cap or visor, on notebooks or other personal possessions. Baggy clothing and bags in which to hide spray cans may also be an indicator. These include pull-over jackets, zip-ups with hoods, military jackets and backpacks. Frequently, taggers have paint or marker-pen dye on their hands, under their fingernails, or on their shoes. Parents may find surgical gloves, loose spray can tips or other graffiti devices such as paint sticks (streak markers) or etching tools.

*If you think your child or someone you know may be involved in graffiti, gangs or drugs, the following resources can assist you:*

- Contact your child's school to find out if your child's teacher or principal has noticed your child's involvement in any of the above activities and if the school offers assistance with these issues.

*You may also find help by calling:*

- Police Department's Gang Prevention Program 531-2847
- Police Department's Juvenile Administration 531-2270

*After school activities are provided by:*

- STAR/PAL Program 531-2718
- City of San Diego libraries 236-5800
- City park and recreation centers 525-8213

### Report Graffiti Vandals

If you see graffiti vandalism in progress, call 911 and report it immediately to the San Diego Police Department. Do not confront the vandals. Although they may appear to be harmless, graffiti vandals may be carrying weapons. The police will respond based on the priority of the crime compared to others for which they have calls at the time.

The City's new Spray and Pay Program rewards citizens up to \$500 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of graffiti vandals. Call the Graffiti Control Program Hotline at **525-8522** for a brochure explaining the program or for a claim form. Spray and Pay Program brochures and claim forms are also available at the City of San Diego Community Service Centers and at San Diego Police Department storefronts and satellite offices.

### Report Graffiti

If you see graffiti in your neighborhood on public or private property, report it immediately to the Graffiti Control Hotline at **525-8522**. Calls to the Graffiti Hotline are confidential. City crews remove graffiti from city property, usually within four days of receiving a report. City Code Compliance Officers must notify private property owners of graffiti on their property and of their responsibility to remove it. Depending on the cooperation of property owners, it could take longer for graffiti to be removed from private properties.

**Visit us on the City's Website at: [www.sandiego.gov](http://www.sandiego.gov)**

### Paint Over Graffiti As Soon As It Appears

If you find graffiti on your property, you should remove it immediately. By painting over graffiti as soon as possible, you will discourage further graffiti. Graffiti vandals want to be recognized for their work, and once they realize that their graffiti is removed quickly from a location, they will ultimately move on to other locations. It may take multiple paintouts to deter the vandals. Be persistent!

### Contact the City's Paint and Materials Exchange Bank

The City of San Diego operates a Paint and Materials Exchange Bank in the Chollas View area where citizens can obtain free recycled paint in limited colors for graffiti removal. Call the Paint Bank at **527-5419** to make an appointment for pick up of paint and supplies.

### Strategies for Keeping Property Graffiti Free

Check your local hardware store for special products that can be applied to surfaces, making them graffiti resistant. Install good lighting on walls and fences which may be vulnerable to graffiti. Plant shrubs or climbing vines to restrict access to graffiti prone areas. Plants with thorns or foul scents are especially useful deterrents. And finally, encourage your neighbors to watch for and report graffiti vandals.

## Conduct Neighborhood Paintouts

Neighborhood paintouts 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 paintouts 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. Paintouts also give parents a forum to discuss graffiti and vandalism with their children.



The City of San Diego's Graffiti Control Program actively encourages involvement by property owners and concerned citizens to help prevent and remove graffiti. By working together, we can solve the graffiti problem.

### How to Conduct a Neighborhood Paintout

- Form a committee with representatives from all sectors of the neighborhood.
- Discuss plans and choose a date for the paintout.
- Use the Paint and Materials Exchange Bank or solicit donations from local businesses to obtain paint and other supplies for your paintout.
- Select a place for volunteers to register.
- Send out a notice (flyer) of the event, requesting volunteers from households, businesses, schools and others in the area. Ask area churches to include notices in their bulletins.
- Contact the City of San Diego Graffiti Control Program for assistance with informational materials or promotional items (i.e., buttons, erasers, book covers, pencils, etc.).
- Alert newspapers, TV, radio stations of your plans and ask them to publicize and cover the event.
- On the day of the paintout, post safety guidelines or have them printed and distributed to volunteers as they check in.
- Make arrangements to clean up the area after the paintout. Have volunteers ready to assist in gathering painting supplies like brushes and paint cans. Put brushes in plastic bags and clean them out in a location where the water will not go into the street and pollute our water resources. Save extra paint for future paintouts.
- Provide plastic bags in which to store paint rollers and brushes.
- Provide refreshments or a picnic afterwards to thank volunteers.
- Have the planning committee discuss ways to keep the neighborhood graffiti-free (i.e., arranging strategy for future paintouts, identifying frequently hit places, designating paintout routes, posting signs and planting landscape).

## Rules and Guidelines for a Safe and Successful Paintout

- *Always* get permission from the person responsible for the property before painting it.
- Do not paint any public property, including sidewalks, curbs, U.S. Postal Service mail boxes or traffic signs. Call **1-800-275-8777** to report graffiti on U.S. Postal Service mailboxes. Call **527-7500** to report graffiti on stop signs and street signs. Call **858-467-4042** to report graffiti on Caltrans structures, private property, utility boxes, or other responsible entity is unknown.
- When working near traffic, have volunteers wear safety vests or bright clothing.
- Graffiti on painted surfaces should be covered with paint that matches the primary background color as closely as possible. If matching is impossible, use a color that blends into the entire background. This will eliminate the "pop" effect. Save some paint for "touch up" jobs.
- Do not paint natural surfaces (brick, wood), and do not paint over signs or logos unless you have the consent of the property owner.
- Don't waste paints or solvents. Small amounts of unusable latex paint in cans should be left to dry out. Once the paint is completely dry it can be disposed of in the trash. Large amounts of paint, solvents and any other hazardous materials should be taken to a City Household Hazardous Waste Collection event. Call the **Household Hazardous Waste Hotline (1-800-694-7000)** to find the next event.
- Water used to clean painting supplies is hazardous to the environment. This water should not be disposed of by pouring it down storm drains, into streets or on the ground. This polluted water can harm marine life as well as humans who use the ocean for recreation and as a source of food. Painting supplies should be washed out in the sink where the water will go into the sewage treatment system and not seep directly into the ocean or ground water. *Remaining paint should not be poured down the drain. It should be brought to a HHW collection event.*
- For other graffiti removal advice and assistance, call the **Graffiti Control Hotline (525-8522)**.

### Citizen Safety

Although threats have been made against citizens who have coordinated successful efforts to remove graffiti from their neighborhoods, to date there are no known incidents in San Diego of violence towards citizens engaged in graffiti abatement.