



AlCrime Reduction Matters

No. 81 January 2010

Strategies to combat graffiti

Graffiti refers to the act of marking property with writing, symbols or graphics and is illegal when produced without consent (White 2001). Types of graffiti include tagging, large and elaborate 'pieces', political graffiti and urban art (the only legal form of graffiti). Each type has distinctive features and motives for creation can include peer status, notoriety and political protest. Aside from property damage costs, the presence of graffiti can negatively impact on feelings of security and safety in the community and can indicate a decline in the quality of public space within a community, resulting in more serious crimes being committed. Substantial costs for graffiti clean-up and prevention are also incurred by local and state governments, business and private property owners (Morgan & Louis 2009).

In recent years, graffiti has emerged as a key priority in crime prevention for Australian states and territories. Halsey and Young (2002) noted that the way in which councils and state governments defined different types of graffiti impacted on council tolerance levels and prevention strategies used. Emerging strategies from state and local governments incorporate both preventative and reactive measures, with many aimed at implementing grassroots anti-graffiti action and community involvement. For example:

- Numerous jurisdictions have implemented legislation to criminalise graffiti vandalism as damage to property, particularly on public transport. The *Criminal Code Amendment (Graffiti) Bill 2009* (WA) restricts the sale of graffiti implements to people over the age of 18 years, the *Graffiti Prevention Act 2007* (Vic) allows public transport officers to seize graffiti implements from suspected persons and the *Graffiti Control Act 2008* (NSW) imposes hefty fines and/or imprisonment for graffiti vandalism or possessing a graffiti implement.
- State taskforces such as Anti-Graffiti Action Team (NSW), Graffiti Taskforce (WA) and Taskforce Against Graffiti (Qld) have been developed for the management of anti-graffiti strategies, to create graffiti removal plans and to ensure state graffiti policy commitments are realised effectively.
- Community grants programs, which encourage local involvement in graffiti removal and clean-up, are also common. Funded projects have included local distribution of graffiti removal kits and paint vouchers and the creation of portable graffiti removal systems (such as trailers or wheelie bins).
- Crime prevention approaches can include urban art projects, development of graffiti prevention guidelines, presentations on graffiti to local groups, graffiti and safety audits in target areas and the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles to act as graffiti deterrents.

There is limited research and evaluation into the effectiveness of these strategies in reducing graffiti. Systematic data collection of graffiti incidents and their removal are needed to quantify the costs of graffiti vandalism and graffiti strategies (Matruglio 2009). Greater understanding of the nature of graffiti, of graffiti writers and the role of local context will assist to develop effective graffiti prevention strategies (Morgan & Louis 2009).

References

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