

An Garda Síochána

Crime Prevention Information Sheet



Property Crime

Graffiti



Graffiti - a costly menace!

Uncontrolled graffiti is criminal damage and against the law. To the perpetrator it may be intended as a form of artistic expression, a threatening or abusive message or just a wanton act of destructive vandalism. Unfortunately, like all other acts of criminal damage, there are economic costs for the injured parties and many other undesirable results for society in general.

Undesired and permanent graffiti sends out the strong social message that the property is not respected, is not under proper control and the area is not an attractive place to live or work. Un-removed graffiti can also encourage other acts of vandalism and eventually lead to the growth of hostile and uncontrolled environments. It can start a cycle of decay, which if not tackled or controlled, also generates greater fear and alienation for people who must live and work in these areas.

It is important to realise that graffiti is not the work of an "unknown or aspiring artist" but an act of criminal damage that encourages further criminal acts and has economic and social costs that must be borne by everybody.



Graffiti also means:

- Clean up costs that can vary greatly depending on the surface being defaced
- Unsightly defacement of structures
- Increased fear of crime
- Encouragement of other forms of crime and vandalism
- Reduced attraction or incentive to live and work in the area
- Falling property prices
- Reduced inward investment and employment

Does graffiti have a pattern?

Most graffiti is committed by people who are generally within three groups or categories. Firstly there are "writers". These are usually responsible for some of the more flamboyant or artistic styles of graffiti. They will usually work in small groups and display their work in highly visible locations such as the tops of buildings, on bridge structures or underpasses. They will take great time and effort, including risks, to display their work. This can then lead to further competition from similar minded individuals and a proliferation of the problem. Secondly there are "taggers" who are generally individuals who have a personalised or stylized signature or writing. Their motivation is usually to deface as many areas as possible with their own work. Finally, there may be an identified gang or unlawful groups who want to send a message. This message, generally intended to be threatening, is usually written in a highly visible location.

By and large, however, graffiti vandals are usually teenagers or young persons. If you are a parent or guardian you should watch for tell tale signs that your children are involved in this activity, such as the possession of spray paint cans and markers or paint residue on their fingers and clothes. They may also have heavily marked personal property or books - could you as a parent identify your child's 'tag'?

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS OR OTHER CRIME PREVENTION ISSUES,
PLEASE CONTACT
your local GARDÁ CRIME PREVENTION OFFICER
or
visit the Garda website at www.garda.ie**

Graffiti Prevention and Control

The best way of preventing graffiti is to consider the potential areas where it may occur during the planning and design stages of buildings. This will involve carefully choosing the surfaces of the wall or building and limiting the areas available to write on. A textured wall and minimal large bare surfaces will be less attractive to the graffiti vandal. Generally, the more porous the surface the more difficult it will be to clean. Wood and brick will be more attractive than metal structures or oil based painted areas.

In established areas the spread of graffiti can be prevented with the strategic use of plants, such as thorny hedging or fast growing creepers, on vulnerable walls. The use of large blank walls or areas for legitimate advertising or display should be considered. In indoor areas, particularly public toilets, the use of designated graffiti boards can greatly limit the damage to walls and doors out of public view.

The best form of graffiti control is swift and proper clean up. This will stop a copycat style spread and limit its recurrence. It also demonstrates that there is ownership and control of the property and frustrates the work of the vandal. Graffiti operators are unlikely to return to areas, where they have invested their time and money, to find that their work is always removed immediately. The entire surface area that has been defaced should be cleaned or repainted and not just spot covering the affected area as this can encourage repeat offences by the culprit.



Spot covering - not recommended

It is very important that persons employed in graffiti removal are made aware of black spots and use materials or paints that will dissuade a potential recurrence.

The following photographs give an idea of how graffiti can deface a neighbourhood and common-place items therein. There is nothing attractive in this type of behaviour - it shows a complete disregard and contempt for people living in the area, their property and the environment as a whole.



Defaced window and doors



Defaced parking meter



Defaced recycling bins and utility cabinet



Defaced pavement and traffic sign

The advice contained in this information sheet is not intended to be exhaustive or absolute.

Nothing contained in this publication should be interpreted as mandatory, obligatory or designed to conflict with any statutory regulations.

Useful Contacts and Links

**The Garda National Crime Prevention Unit,
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