

Graffiti Prevention: Tips for Homeowners

How does graffiti “hurt”?

Graffiti sends the signal that nobody cares, attracting other forms of crime and street delinquency to a neighborhood. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that "graffiti contributes to lost revenue associated with reduced ridership on transit systems, reduced retail sales and declines in property value."¹ The appearance of graffiti heightens resident fear and is often perceived as a sign that a downward spiral has begun, even though this may not be true.

How can a homeowner prevent graffiti?

1. Get educated

Learn about graffiti vandalism, how it impacts you and your community, how to report it, and who is responsible for graffiti prevention and cleanup in your area. Start by visiting Keep America Beautiful's **Graffiti Hurts**[®] web site at www.graffitihurts.org. Then go to your city's or county's web site.

2. Keep up appearances

Make every effort to keep the appearance of your residence clean and neat.² According to the Los Angeles Police Department, an exterior appearance that suggests apathy and neglect attracts vandals. Litter, broken fences, overgrown landscaping, and poor lighting all send a message to vandals that property owners are not attentive or do not care.³

3. Remove graffiti quickly

Rapid and continual removal of graffiti is the best way for homeowners to protect their property and preserve the image of their neighborhood. Studies show that removal within 24 to 48 hours results in a nearly zero rate of reoccurrence.⁴ Also, work with your city or county to ensure that graffiti is removed rapidly from public areas near or around your residence.

4. Build in prevention

- Incorporate shrubs, thorny plants, and vines to restrict vandal access to residence walls, fences, sheds, garages, and other graffiti targets.
- Add or improve lighting around your property to promote natural surveillance. Ask your community to install lighting in neighborhood areas that are dark and often hit with graffiti.
- Consider a home security system and post signs that such a system is in operation.
- For condo or coop owners, work with residential property managers to incorporate graffiti prevention into building security.

3. Work with neighbors and law enforcement

- Organize a Neighborhood Watch (www.usaonwatch.org) to help law enforcement keep tabs on criminal activity in your neighborhood.
- Ask police to step up security in your neighborhood, especially if there are alleys, unlit areas, vacant properties, or other graffiti targets near your residence.
- Adopt-a-spot in your neighborhood and keep it graffiti free.
- Work with a Keep America Beautiful affiliate to coordinate a local graffiti awareness campaign.
- Dedicate a neighborhood association meeting to graffiti prevention. Invite law enforcement.

¹ Deborah Lamm Weisel, "Graffiti," U.S. Department of Justice Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Series No. 9 2002.

² Cornelius Ashton and Jordan Mirakian, "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: The Linda Vista Continuing Education Center," Campus Law Enforcement Journal Volume: 31 Issue: 4 July/August 2001, pp. 19, 21-22.

³ Los Angeles Police Department, "Los Angeles Police Department Commercial Burglary Prevention Circular," 2001.

⁴ Jay Beswick and Ernie Garrett, Graffiti Prevention Systems, data from over 1,500 sites in Los Angeles County from 1990-1991.

How might a “graffiti ordinance” affect a homeowner?

Local graffiti ordinances vary, and some communities do not have an ordinance that targets graffiti. Usually a graffiti ordinance dictates how quickly graffiti must be removed and who is responsible for removal. It may also outline specific penalties for convicted graffiti vandals.

Some ordinances require homeowners to remove graffiti on their property. Others have the city or county remove graffiti, but charge the homeowner a fee. Communities may also have programs in place to remove graffiti on private property at no charge to the owner. For individuals who live in a co-op or condo, cleanup would be the responsibility of the condo association. For apartment dwellers or other tenants, the owner of the building or property is responsible for cleanup.

Graffiti removal by someone other than the homeowner usually requires permission from the owner/agent. Find out how graffiti removal on private property is handled in your community. Also learn who is responsible for graffiti cleanup of public areas in your neighborhood, such as sound barriers, utility boxes, bus shelters, sidewalks, and other graffiti targets. Get a copy of any local graffiti ordinance.

What should a homeowner do if their property is hit with graffiti?

1. **Report.** Contact the police to report graffiti vandalism using a non-emergency number. Make sure police complete an incident report, a common requirement of insurance companies. Also, contact any graffiti “hotline” operating in your community to report graffiti and get information on cleanup.
2. **Identify.** Work with local authorities to identify if the graffiti is being done by taggers or gangs. If it is gang graffiti, ask law enforcement about any safety concerns.
3. **Document.** Take a picture of the graffiti before it is removed. Photographs will assist law enforcement in their investigation.
4. **Remove.** Remove graffiti promptly and completely. To ensure safety, work with law enforcement on removing any identified gang graffiti.

How should graffiti be removed?

To select the appropriate method for graffiti removal, consider the surface, costs, environmental impacts, and any local restrictions. Except for the paint out, homeowners may need to either consult with a graffiti removal service or contract with them for cleanup. A paint bank or other removal assistance may be available from the city or county. Removal methods include:

- **Paint out** – on painted surfaces, painting over graffiti is a low-cost removal method. Be sure to color match the paint to the surface. A patchwork of paint or a large block of different color paint is an ideal canvas and will invite more graffiti.
- **Chemical removal** – this method employs some type of solvent to remove graffiti. To ensure safety, consult a graffiti removal service or work with the city or county if this type of cleanup is required.
- **Power washing** – this removes graffiti by applying water, usually hot, under pressure. Power washing may be used after applying a paint solvent to the graffiti area. An abrasive, such as baking soda, may also be added to the water to remove a thin layer of the surface, and with it, the graffiti. Consult with a graffiti removal service or work with the city or county for this type of cleanup.

Resources

For community-based graffiti prevention resources, tap in to **Graffiti Hurts**[®] at www.graffitihurts.org, or find a local Keep America Beautiful affiliate at www.kab.org and start to clean up your neighborhood.

