

Graffiti A Billion Dollar Crime!

Did you realize an estimated \$12 billion a year is spent cleaning up graffiti in the United States?

Unfortunately, graffiti or “tagging” has become a part of our youth’s culture. While the youth of our communities have many pressures to deal with, some of them have turned to spray painting their tagging name, or moniker, on our public streets, walls, alleyways, businesses, and even homes. The tagger’s goal is to place his or her moniker or “tag” on as much property as possible in order to obtain the most publicity.

First, we must be able to distinguish between the two different types of graffiti. Most people believe that all graffiti is gang graffiti. However, most of the graffiti that we see is the result of tagging crews. These crews are groups of young teens that exist to place their monikers on every wall, sign, window, or available space possible. Most young teens get involved in tagging simply because they do not have any constructive activities to keep them busy. These groups of teens who tag identify themselves as “crews.” Once a group of teens become active in tagging, they become protective of their crew name and their individual monikers. The loyalty that the teens have to their crews can eventually transform the crew into a full-fledged gang.

We are all aware of the pitfalls of the gang lifestyle; however, many people do not understand that activity in a tagging crew can point a young person into the direction of gang membership. Let us recognize that tagging and the tagging crews are not just ways for our youth to express themselves, it can be a road to membership in a gang.

Some signs that your child may be involved in tagging include some of the following. Most taggers will write their moniker or tag on their personal property. They will write their moniker on their backpacks, school folders and books, and even on the walls of their own bedroom. Check your child’s books, backpacks, and folders to determine if there are any signs of tagging activity.

The tools of the trade for taggers and graffiti artist are spray paint cans, paint gel, permanent felt tip markers, stickers or sticky back items and etching devices. These items are unlawful for a minor to possess. When law enforcement discovers a minor in possession of these tagging tools with the intent to commit vandalism, the minor can be arrested and charged pursuant to the California Penal Code.

As we can see, the cost of graffiti begins to mount as we see more of it in our cities. There are many costs involved in the removal of graffiti. We must consider the man hours needed to remove it, the police reports that are written to document it, and the negative effect on home property values. Furthermore, graffiti contributes to lost revenue associated with reduced ridership on transit systems, reduced retail sales and a perception of blight, which heightens fear of gang activity.

As a community we must take ownership of our neighborhoods and become involved in combating graffiti. It is recommended that you do not personally confront a tagger but instead be a good witness and obtain as much information as possible and notify law enforcement.

To report graffiti vandalism in progress or if you have identifying information to report on a tagger, call the South Los Angeles Sheriff’s Station at: 1-323-820-6700

To get graffiti cleaned up contact the Los Angeles County Graffiti Abatement hotline at: 1-800-675-4357 or click the report graffiti icon on our website.

