



Media Information

For Responsible Reporting of Graffiti Vandalism

November 2017

Graffiti vandalism affects every member of the community, whether it be directly or indirectly. As with any crime prevention initiative, the management and prevention of graffiti vandalism is not up to one single agency. Whilst the government is committed to leading the efforts to reduce graffiti vandalism in our State, graffiti reduction is the responsibility of each and every community member.

The media plays a vital role in the community, and in keeping with the whole-of-community approach this information pack has been developed to assist all Western Australia media outlets in becoming familiar with the complexities of reporting on graffiti vandalism.

The Importance of Common Language

Graffiti or *graffiti vandalism* refers to the illegal activity of defacing private and/or public property without the consent of the property owner. *Urban art* refers to legal work, where permission to mark a surface has been granted by the owner of the property.

It is important that we use a common term when reporting on graffiti vandalism, as a consistent use of language shows a whole-of-community approach in addressing the issue. The preferred language differentiates between the legal versus the illegal, and prevents confusion for would-be offenders and the general public.

The State Graffiti Taskforce

The development of the *Tough on Graffiti Strategy 2015-2017* (the *Strategy*) by the State Graffiti Taskforce reflects a rigorously coordinated approach for expressing a whole-of-government response to the management and prevention of graffiti vandalism.

The purpose of the *Strategy* is to provide a new way forward in the delivery of graffiti vandalism reduction initiatives, that more effectively and appropriately respond to address offender behaviour and prevention activities in Western Australia.

The vision of the *Strategy* is: *that all Western Australians feel safe living in communities which are free of graffiti vandalism.* This vision will be achieved through the following three goals:

1. To decrease the number of graffiti vandalism offenders;
2. To keep neighbourhoods free from graffiti vandalism; and
3. To ensure all graffiti vandalism is reported and recorded

For further information on the *Tough on Graffiti Strategy 2015-2017* click [here](#).

Graffiti and the Media

The media is an essential stakeholder in the *Strategy*. By providing publicity of the [Goodbye Graffiti website](#) and hotline (1800 44 22 55), members of the public are made aware of the graffiti reporting mechanisms. This in turn increases public reporting of graffiti incidents and accelerates the process of graffiti removal activity.

Other positive roles of the media include:

- Community awareness – It is very important for the community to receive a balanced report of what is occurring in their neighbourhood so they can be alert to their environment. This has the potential to discourage would-be offenders;
- Awareness of the consequences for those involved in graffiti – This can deter those who could possibly be influenced or curious in committing this crime, to decide against this action;
- Community satisfaction – When media outlets run stories on community services undertaken to combat graffiti vandalism, this encourages community pride and satisfaction; and
- Awareness of graffiti prevention initiatives – Similar to increasing the public's awareness of reporting incidents of graffiti vandalism, media outlets have the power to alert the general public on initiatives such as the [Goodbye Graffiti Rewards Program](#).

Whilst media outlets certainly play a positive role in graffiti prevention, there is also a potentially damaging role. The negative influences of the media include:

- Recognition for the offender – there is instant fame given to the graffiti vandal when their damage/tag is shown recognisably in a photograph or on television; and
- Increases the perception of crime within the community – the community does not feel secure where graffiti is highly visible, as it promotes that antisocial behaviour is prevalent and more than likely, other criminal activities are occurring in that area thereby making residents feel unsafe. Without the positive stories, the general public do not receive a balanced description.

The Limitations of Graffiti Statistics

Please exercise caution when reporting on graffiti statistics. It is important to understand the limitations of graffiti statistics as they are not accurate in reflecting the extent of graffiti vandalism in our State. Graffiti vandalism often goes unreported to the police for several reasons:

- Many individuals are proactive in addressing graffiti vandalism and remove 'minor' graffiti from their assets without reporting the incident.
- The major asset owners such as local councils and the major infrastructure owners tend to be the principal victims of graffiti vandalism. Due to the high volume of incidents it is not practical that a victim report is completed and recorded for each incident.
- Graffiti 'tags' are often placed several times, by the one vandal, within the same area. In some instances these 'tags' are being reported as one incident (i.e. one 'tag' placed several times) or as separate incidents (i.e. each 'tag' reported individually as a separate incident).
- Sometimes it is difficult for members of the public to ascertain who the asset owner is. For this reason not all graffiti is reported or in some instances the same graffiti is reported more than once by different people

For information on statistics please visit the [Goodbye Graffiti website](#).

What can Media Outlets do to Report Responsibly?

There are measures media outlets can take to responsibly report on graffiti vandalism.

These include:

- Avoid tag images - When doing a visual story on graffiti, it is important not to show actual tags that have been scribbled onto a surface. If you do this, the graffiti vandal obtains instant recognition and fame of which they have sought. It is requested that all images showing illegal graffiti vandalism be blurred to make the tag unidentifiable;
- Positive stories - Report on the positive stories on graffiti prevention such as community volunteer groups and urban art projects.
- Language - Use language which is consistent with the message the State Government is promoting;
- Statistics - Exercise caution when reporting on statistics. Graffiti statistics are unreliable and under-reported;
- Copycat offending - Avoid showing dangerous practices such as train surfing. This often increases copycat offending and again, gives notoriety to the offender and;
- Use of music - Be aware of the selection of music played with a story. Using certain types of music can increase glorification of graffiti vandalism and set stereotypes within the graffiti culture.

For More Information

Please contact Western Australia Police Force, Department of Media and Public Affairs on 9222 1011, or visit the Goodbye Graffiti website: www.goodbyegraffiti.wa.gov.au.

Other useful links:

[For more information on the Tough on Graffiti Strategy click here...](#)

[For more information on the State Graffiti Taskforce click here...](#)

[For information on research papers click here...](#)

[For information on graffiti and the law click here...](#)