

10 STEPS TO A GRAFFITI-FREE CITY

by Rick Stanton

Everyone wants a Graffiti-Free City. Follow these 10 steps and that is exactly what you will get. Each of these steps is important and each needs to be taken to the max – full throttle. Otherwise ... you are just going through the motions. Do them all and do them well and you will be successful. Good luck!

10. COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

Property with graffiti is owned and is the responsibility of many agencies including the city, the state, the federal government, transportation agencies, utility companies, etc. It is critical that these groups not only meet regularly to discuss mutual issues related to graffiti, but they also cooperate and assist each other when necessary. Most of the time, members of the public don't know (or care) who has the responsibility of removing graffiti ... they just want it gone as soon as possible. The damage that occurs when these groups take the stand that "it is not our property so it is not our problem" is difficult to repair.

9. GETTING THE WORD OUT

Outreach is necessary for a successful "Anti-Graffiti" program. The public needs to know how to report graffiti and how to volunteer to eradicate it. Also, the vandals need to get the message that graffiti is not tolerated in their city. Successful anti-graffiti programs use a variety of tools to ac-



complish public outreach. One is the use of billboards. Another outreach tool is ads that are placed on taxicabs. This allows a mobile message to be spread over your city. Cable TV ads offer free or affordable spots for anti-graffiti messages. Getting the word out through the schools and community meetings is also very effective.

8. ALTERNATIVES TO GRAFFITI

The majority of graffiti or "tagging" is committed by male youths between the ages of 12 and 18. One piece of a successful anti-graffiti program is to offer alternatives to tagging. The use of murals is a fairly successful alternative. Public murals can beautify a city and are usually not destroyed by graffiti vandals. Schools and parks and recreation programs can reach out to the youth at risk to identify kids who tag and offer art programs and education about the risk of tagging (i.e., injury, jail, cost to their parents). Gang activity accounts

for varying degrees of graffiti so every effort should be made to provide anti-gang alternatives.

7. STRONG ANTI-GRAFFITI ORDINANCE

Every city should have a strong anti-graffiti ordinance that requires property owners to remove graffiti on their property within 48 hours of its occurrence. The property owners would be in violation of the ordinance if they did not remove the graffiti within 48 hours and subject to a fine. Prior to issuing a fine, the city should issue a warning letter to the

owner in violation that explains the ordinance and gives them a short (10 days) time period to comply. The city should also offer a free one-time graffiti removal service to the owner and leave them extra paint as a gesture of support prior to issuing fines for future violations.

6. PROACTIVE GRAFFITI ABATEMENT

The most effective way to remove graffiti is to do it proactively. Proactive abatement is simple: see it ... clean it. Provide proactive abatement where the graffiti can be seen by the most people. All graffiti seen from highways, expressways and busy city streets should be targeted. Another targeted area should be neighborhoods where there is a chronic graffiti problem. It is important to clean these locations frequently (once a week will drastically reduce the amount of future graffiti); plan on staying at these sites for the long haul. When the graffiti has been virtually

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eliminated, expand into another area but don't leave the original location or other graffiti will return immediately.

5. POLICE OFFICERS DEDICATED TO GRAFFITI CASES

When police departments rely on all of their officers to catch graffiti vandals, what typically happens is that very few actually step forward and aggressively pursue a graffiti case. Most officers are either too busy or are not motivated to work on "lower level" crimes such as graffiti vandalism. This results in a significantly lower number of citations issued and arrests for graffiti related offenses than if the city had full-time officers dedicated to building graffiti cases. These officers will infiltrate the graffiti networks in their cities and catch the leaders of the tagging crews. This is a huge step toward graffiti prevention.

4. JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT TREATS GRAFFITI VIOLATIONS SERIOUSLY

Studies have shown that the "fear of getting caught" is the single biggest answer that graffiti vandals state when asked, "What would get you to stop tagging"? Dedicated police officers who focus on graffiti crimes will

increase the number of vandals who are cited or arrested. However, if no serious consequences are given to all those convicted of graffiti vandalism, there will be no "fear of getting caught." The consequences also need to significantly increase for subsequent graffiti vandalism offenses. The vandals are not helped when they walk away with a warning or a minor sentence. This will not be enough to get them to stop tagging. In order to help them stop this destructive behavior, they need to know that they will be held accountable by sentences such as: incarceration, community service, restitution, etc.

3. TELEPHONE HOTLINE TO REPORT GRAFFITI

Many residents are happy to volunteer to remove graffiti in their neighborhoods. There are also many situations, however, when the graffiti needs to be abated by city staff. The city should have a Graffiti Reporting Hotline for people to call at any time. They can leave information about graffiti on a recorder. City staff will take this information off of the recorder and then go and clean off the graffiti. In order for the Hotline system to work, the abatement needs to occur quickly (24 to 48 hours). If the city takes too long to

remove the graffiti, the residents will lose confidence in the city workers and stop calling.

2. VOLUNTEERS AND FREE SUPPLIES

Volunteers are a key ingredient for a successful anti-graffiti program. When provided with free supplies (i.e., rubber gloves, solvent, paint, brushes, rollers), volunteers become the hands and eyes that every city needs to combat graffiti. Volunteers take care of graffiti in their neighborhoods and report graffiti to the "Hotline" when they see it outside of their neighborhood. It is important to recognize and honor the volunteers to keep them motivated and going strong. The work of the volunteers, combined with city eradication staff is a winning combination in reducing graffiti.

1. ROLES OF THE CITY MANAGER, MAYOR AND COUNCIL

A successful anti-graffiti program always starts at the highest level of city government. The city manager, mayor and city council are the driving force to combat graffiti. They must take a stand and agree that graffiti is not to be tolerated in their city. Most importantly, they need to provide the resources to accomplish their anti-graffiti goals. After providing the necessary tools and funding for anti-graffiti efforts, city officials must monitor the goals of the program and hold the staff accountable for reaching those goals.

It can and does take time to design and master each of these steps so that they begin to have the desired affect - drastically reducing graffiti. Also remember that it takes all 10 to really make a difference. You cannot have four of these working really well and not have the other six at all or having them running at a minimum level. You will also see that money is not a major issue in many of these steps. However, it does take strong leadership to continue to push this anti-graffiti agenda through because some of these steps can take a long time to put into place.

Finally, don't be afraid to ask for help from trusted sources who have had experience in helping cities reduce their graffiti.

Good luck and get busy! □

Rick Stanton's expertise is in helping cities drastically reduce their graffiti in his role as owner of the Graffiti Consultants. You can contact Rick Stanton for more information at 408-206-4259 or rickforre@sbcglobal.net.



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