



# CITY OF MONASH GRAFFITI REMOVAL POLICY AND STRATEGY 2012-2015

Adopted by Council: 31 July 2012

## **GRAFFITI REMOVAL POLICY & STRATEGY**

### **AIM:**

To identify strategies to minimise the incidence of graffiti within the City of Monash and to detail current procedures for the removal of graffiti from Council assets.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the recommendations as detailed in section 6 of this report be adopted.

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## **1. Introduction**

Graffiti can be defined as the end process of defacing property, often it can be with explicit and offensive material.

Graffiti vandalism is considered by many as a crime. It is the act of marking or defacing premises or other property without permission. Graffiti destroys the appearance of property and buildings. Socially, the presence of graffiti may generate considerable concern from the community and create an unsafe feeling.

The first form is normally known as a “tag”. Tagging is the simplest type of graffiti, consisting of the writer’s street name in one colour. The second form is known as “throw-ups”. A throw-up is a little more complicated than a tag, usually having two or three colours, but not nearly as elaborate as a piece. A throw-up is something that can be done quickly and repeatedly, while still identifying the writer. It is usually characterised by ‘fat’ bubble style lettering. Another form is known as a “Stencil”. Stencils are a quick and effective way to put up somewhat-complicated pieces very quickly. By holding the stencil against the wall and spraying, you can get a much more detailed picture than you would be able to with just a spray can. The final form is a “piece”. A piece (short for masterpiece) is a graffiti painting, much more complex than a tag and having at least three colours. Pieces are hard to do illegally because of the time and effort involved, so a good piece will gain a lot of respect for that particular graffiti artist.

In simple terms, graffiti destroys the appearance of property and buildings. In particular, buildings of both private and public ownership may have much of their charm and character marred by such defacement. Socially, the presence of graffiti may generate considerable concern from the community. A perceived lack of control in an area and a feeling of fear in both residents and visitors may be likely outcomes.

The unchecked sprawl of graffiti has the potential to seriously undermine the attractiveness of the City. In this context the need for a program to adequately combat graffiti becomes paramount.

## **2. Current Practice**

### **2.1 City of Monash**

Council policy for managing Graffiti within the municipality as follows: -

- Any Graffiti on Council buildings, playground equipment, signs, etc, will be removed within 5 working days. Should the Graffiti be of the offensive nature it will be actioned within 2 working days.
- Graffiti on private property is the responsibility of the owner. However, should the graffiti be deemed by Council to be of an offensive nature, eg. profanity or racist remarks, Council may paint over or remove the offensive component of the graffiti after attempting to seek the permission of the owner of the property.
- Graffiti on other public property is the responsibility of the relevant authority.

- Council will remove the graffiti on fencing facing the public space at Council reserves, within the available resources.
- Cleansing Services are reporting all instances of graffiti in public toilets. All open, and operational public toilets are being cleaned *daily* and Cleansing Services will remove small amounts of graffiti on site

### **2.1.1 Areas of no jurisdiction**

Council will not remove any graffiti from any property of other authorities. (eg, Freeway or Rail reserves)

### **2.1.2 Initiatives within the municipality**

- Council has been working in partnership with various Chambers of Commerce and community groups endeavouring to keep the area clear of graffiti by providing paint to cover graffiti in some high risk areas. The City of Monash provides paint to the Department of Justice for the South Metropolitan Community Correctional Services – Graffiti Removal Program at approximately 23 City of Monash owned sites.
- Community Groups are reporting on the location of graffiti within the municipality, this enables Council to act on offensive graffiti and advise the Community on the removal process.
- Graffiti removal kits are available to residents when graffiti is reported.
- Graffiti that has been reported is being logged in Pathways (Council’s customer service tracking system).
- Regularly patrolled either by Council employees, police and community groups.

## **2.2 Historical Statistics**

The City of Monash has given away approximately 535 graffiti removal kits to residential property owners since 2007 and 100 to traders as a result of Graffiti removal projects funded by the Department of Justice.

Between May 2011 and May 2012, there have been 556 work orders generated for graffiti removal through our Infrastructure services department.

In the 2011/2012 financial year, approximately \$13,000 was spent by the City of Monash on paint for Department of Justice for the South Metropolitan Community Correctional Services – Graffiti Removal Program.

Between January 2009 to July 2012 there have been 94 letters recorded in our Record Management System from the community relating to graffiti on council and private properties. Also between January 2009 and July 2012, there have

been 61 reports generated from Neatstreets with photographs of graffiti on private and Council property.

Between January 2009 to July 2012 there have been:

- 99 reports on the Pathways system for graffiti in Council Reserves.
- 34 reports on the Pathways system for graffiti on Council Buildings.
- 125 reports on the Pathways system for graffiti on Council Roads.

### 3. Cleaning Materials and Techniques

Graffiti can be removed from almost every type of surface including brick, Perspex, bluestone, sandstone, timber, painted surfaces, tiles, texture or rendered coats, concrete and bitumen.

A variety of techniques are used to remove graffiti, which generally involves mixing a blend of chemicals, which is dependent on the graffiti type, and applying it to the surface. It is then left for a short period of time to allow the chemical to “soften” the graffiti. It is then rinsed off utilising high pressure water blasting.

The importance of selecting the correct type or mix of chemicals is critical in terms of restoring the surface to its original condition. Incorrect application of chemicals can lead to damage. Specifically in a brick wall, the following can occur:

- \* *Shadows left in brick pores and mortar joints;*
- \* *Surface defacement:*
- \* *Mortar washout.*

On some painted surfaces it is more cost effective to seal in graffiti and **repaint** than it is to remove. In this context, the colour can be quickly and accurately matched on site to ensure compatibility.

The application of anti-graffiti coatings is also an alternative option for particular problem areas. This generally involves painting or sealing the surface with an anti-graffiti coating, either in a matt finish (*sacrificial coating*) or long life coating. Graffiti removal is then greatly simplified to the extent of spraying the graffiti with a solvent and wiping it away i.e. “*spray and wipe*”.

Sacrificial coatings comprise an acrylic base and are so termed because the removal process removes **both** the graffiti and the coating. The coating then needs to be patch repaired. This type of coating offers a matt finish and tends to blend in with the surface.

Long life coatings generally consist of a two pack polyethylene base and can provide protection against the penetration of graffiti for up to 10 years. In this context, graffiti removal can be performed hundreds of times. This type of coating is *full gloss* and is

generally more noticeable on the treated surface than the sacrificial coating. In terms of cost, the long life coating is significantly more expensive.

Anti-graffiti coatings are not always the most cost-effective or efficient means of protecting a surface. Consideration needs to be given to matching the correct coating base to the surface type, *the frequency of graffiti attack* and of course, budget.

#### **4. Strategies to tackle graffiti:**

A number of strategies have been developed to address the problems of graffiti including the prompt removal of graffiti and measures to minimize the incidence of graffiti.

These strategies are discussed below:

##### **4.1 Removal of Graffiti**

Crucial to the success of any strategy to reduce graffiti is the cleaning and removal process. *It should be immediate and consistent to minimize the exposure of the graffitist's work.* The process however, tends to falter, not in the removal of graffiti, but rather in the **reporting** of graffiti. A significant time period may elapse between the time of the offence and the reporting of the event *i.e. days, weeks, months.* Council can only act on arranging the removal of the graffiti if it is aware of the event *i.e. phone, letter, in person etc.*

In noting the above, it can be seen that the removal of graffiti is being undertaken on a reactive rather than a proactive basis.

Improvements to the process can however, be attained if formal procedures were established to encourage people to report graffiti. In this context, the establishment of a *"graffiti reporting line"* may well be a worthwhile initiative.

The involvement of local traders via their respective Traders Associations is considered to be essential in the prompt reporting of graffiti. Increasing awareness amongst the traders would certainly assist in the efficient removal of graffiti from public assets *i.e. as soon as possible within Council's nominated time frame.* Their assistance in flagging the importance of the program and seeking the involvement and co-operation of traders would be particularly beneficial.

In summary, accurate and timely reporting is a key element for rapid removal.

##### **4.2 Private Property, Legislation and Enforcement**

In relation to the issue of Council funding graffiti removal from private property, consideration needs to be given to levels of exposure from a budgetary point of view. The cost for the removal of normal levels of graffiti is in the order of \$300 per site.

Assuming one shopping precinct was targeted and over a given year, 100 cases of *normal* graffiti were removed, this would effectively lead to a cost of \$30,000 for the one area.

If the program were expanded to include other areas or on a City wide basis, the costs could potentially “blow out” to a significantly high level *i.e. several hundred thousand dollars*.

Given the uncertainty over the potential number of cases, the program could be difficult to control from a funding point of view.

Questions relating to liability for damage to surfaces during the removal of graffiti should also be raised. For example, damage to old brick walls can occur if an incorrect technique and/or chemicals are applied.

In this context would Council be liable for the damage to the wall or would the property owner bear the cost?

Given the above, it may be prudent to highlight the responsibility of owners in removing graffiti from their property. A number of grant applications have been submitted to the Department of Justice in the past to assist with graffiti removal and educating the community on their responsibilities. One grant was for the development of an information card to assist residents to report graffiti to the correct agency responsible for removing it. Another grant was to help develop an education program for traders, focusing initially on the Clayton Shopping Centre, to keep their building free of graffiti. Another was the Chadstone/Ashwood Project which included removal of graffiti, a clean-up event and graffiti removal kits for traders. Funding was awarded in 2011/2012 and was used for the Kingsway Project rear of 2-38 Kingsway. This program included a clean-up event, removal of graffiti and graffiti removal kits for internal and external graffiti maintenance of the properties.

Graffiti kits, which offer a number of techniques or alternatives in removing graffiti, are provided by Council for private residential property owners, when they come in to council and after they have made an attempt to report it to their local Police.

The Victorian Government introduced graffiti-specific legislation, and has expanded and developed new graffiti prevention and removal initiatives. The Graffiti Prevention Act 2007 (the Act) came into operation in July 2008 and provided local Councils with a framework and process to deal with graffiti on private property. The key element of the Act for Council is the ability to serve a notice and allows Council to remove the graffiti if the owner consents to the removal if entry is required or if there is no objection if no entry is required.

The Act identifies that the marking of graffiti as a crime in its own right, attracting tough fines and possible jail time and it gives police greater powers to search for and seize graffiti-related items. The Act supports Councils strategy and it aims to improve feelings of safety in the community and reduce fear of crime. The Graffiti



Prevention Act 2007 is to deter graffiti offenders and, to achieve this; the Act creates several new and specific graffiti offences for:

- Marking graffiti
- Possessing a prescribed graffiti implement
- Possessing a graffiti implement with the intent of using it to mark graffiti
- Advertising for sale a prescribed graffiti implement

Each of the new offences will assist police in detecting and prosecuting graffiti offenders and they will carry substantial penalties. On the 30 June 2008, the restriction on the sale of spray paint cans to minors commenced. Any persons aged less than 18 years of age, unless they have evidence that they require the spray paint for employment purposes can be fined and imprisoned. This measure aims to help limit minors' access to spray paint cans as statistics show this group is most likely to be apprehended for graffiti offences.

To reinforce the importance of the program and demonstrate Council's commitment to minimising levels of graffiti, it may be possible to enforce a local law termed "*Unsightly Land*" to compel the property owner to remove the graffiti.

This local law essentially states that "*... a person must not allow or permit land of which he or she is the owner or occupier to be kept in a manner which is unsightly, dangerous, or detrimental to the general amenity of the neighbourhood in which it is located*".

The enforcement of this law could possibly minimise levels of graffiti on private property.

To assist in this regard, Council may at the request of a property owner, arrange for the removal of the graffiti at the owner's cost. This is raised as an option purely from the point of view of expediting the process and removing the graffiti as quickly as possible and reflects Council's commitment to educating and informing rather than simply resorting to enforcement.

Other enforcement options include dedicated officers patrolling the streets to prevent graffiti and use of cameras and surveillance. All the options come with the associated problems of resourcing, community concerns and privacy issues.

### **4.3 Graffiti Audit**

There are no formal procedures to periodically check graffiti prone areas throughout the City of Monash, although a number of informal audits are conducted. (ie. Monthly, spatial amenity audits by Infrastructure Services Managers, site inspections for the locations of the Department of Justice for the South Metropolitan Community Correctional Services – Graffiti Removal Program and adhoc reporting by staff conducting other inspections).

An initial graffiti audit of areas would identify locations requiring attention in the immediate term.

Subsequent audits on a periodical basis, would allow for continued identification and action. Audits would also help to quantify the amount of graffiti in the municipality to assist with further planning and monitoring of the effectiveness of programs.

Although, audits would identify locations, which would have “slipped” through the normal reporting channels, the cost benefit of formal audit programs would need to be considered. Incorporating the identification of graffiti into existing audit programs may achieve a similar outcome.

#### **4.4 Landscaping**

Landscaping or the planting of bushes in front of walls and/or fences is an effective means of minimizing graffiti.

Plants and/or shrubs 1 to 2m high in a line to form a continuous barrier would be ideal. Even selective planting i.e. bushes every 3-5m would be beneficial as they would tend to break up the surface area and limit the opportunities for graffiti.

Apart from the benefits of minimizing levels of graffiti, landscaping would serve to complement and/or improve the appeal of a building, wall etc. The security risks of such a proposal would however, need to be taken into account. A continuous barrier 1-2m high may provide suitable screening for prowlers and/or undesirables. Accordingly the use of this type of landscaping may only be suitable in selected locations.

#### **4.5 Metro trains and Vic Track**

Whilst railway stations are now relatively free of graffiti, railway sidings and bridges are still prime targets for graffiti artists. The graffiti in these areas has accumulated to an unacceptable level over the years. In an attempt to address this issue, there is a need to formally approach the Metro and Vic Track and seek their co-operation in expanding their graffiti removal program to include sidings and bridges.

A similar approach may also be needed with other agencies within the City of Monash that have extensive assets within the area. For example, JCDecaux maintain bus shelters, keep them clean tidy and graffiti free.

### **5. Annual Cost**

Departments in the City of Monash do not have specific budgets for graffiti removal, prevention, and education, so it is difficult to quantify the actual spend on graffiti management. Based on best estimates the following amounts are spent on various departments;

Assets Services have an annual budget of \$105,000 for graffiti and vandalism. This budget does not distinguish between graffiti and vandalism. The estimated budget is approximately \$100,000 for graffiti removal.

Cleansing Services staff would spend approximately \$5,000 per year on minor graffiti removal from waste, recycling and cigarette butt bins and public toilets. Any larger jobs would be passed on to Asset Services.

Expenditure on bus shelters has not been quantified as this is incorporated into the total cost of the advertising on bus shelters contract managed by JCDecaux.

Recycling and Disposal have an estimated budget of \$10,000 for the supply of Graffiti removal kits to the residential property owners who have reported graffiti on their property.

Other departments such as community planning and development spend a minor amount on graffiti management and education programs.

Any further annual cost to remove graffiti by introducing new programs would principally be from boundary fences facing the public space. These costs will be monitored and if necessary, priority given to the properties or locations that are exposed to a high visitor or user numbers. This area of response could also be addressed through the landscaping of boundary fences, which could be implemented utilising the existing vegetation programs being undertaken within the municipality.

## **6. Other initiatives and Recommended Actions**

Graffiti is a widespread community problem that requires a co-ordinated approach by all levels of government parties to minimise it.

Council's current program whilst removing reported cases of graffiti on Council property within an acceptable time limit, fails to address the issue of non-reported cases on private property.

Property owners are required to remove graffiti from their assets, even though it is no fault of their own and most other Councils have recognised the need to provide some support to residential property owners through the provision of removal kits, paint vouchers and/or full graffiti removal, if it is offensive.

A number of Councils are combating graffiti through removal particularly on Council property with a small number of Councils providing removals services on private property at a high cost. A number of Councils are also working on enforcement and education.

A number of strategies are recommended to minimise the incidence of graffiti, particularly further investigation of an education program possibly involving Grade 5 Primary School students and Year 8 Secondary School students. Youth education is an important element of a successful graffiti minimisation strategy as well as reporting, enforcement, audits and landscaping.

The creation of a graffiti reporting information line to give technical advice on the cleaning and removal of graffiti would also be beneficial.

The involvement and support by relevant Traders Associations is seen to be a key element of this process.

The strategies as detailed below form the City of Monash's Graffiti Strategy and their implementation is expected to significantly minimise the incidence of graffiti.

Accordingly it is recommended that the following be adopted:

<b>Recommended Actions</b>	<b>Responsible Division</b>
1. That the revised City of Monash Graffiti Removal Policy and Strategy be implemented.	Infrastructure Services and City Development
2. That Council's current standards of removing reported graffiti within 5 days or 2 days for particularly urgent cases be maintained.	Infrastructure Services
3. Continue to provide Graffiti Kits to residents whose private property has been attacked.	Infrastructure Services and City Development
4. Further investigation into developing an education program for a number of Primary and Secondary School students with a further report to Council within the next 12 months (July 2013).	Infrastructure Services with assistance from Community Development
5. That future audit programs include the identification and reporting of graffiti.	Infrastructure Services
6. That consideration is given to landscaping in the form of a barrier in selected locations	Infrastructure Services and City Development
7. Approach other authorities such as VicTrack, VicRoads and Melbourne Water to gain cooperation in removing graffiti from their assets.	Infrastructure Services and City Development

