

Condominium Home Owners Association

A non-profit association serving strata owners since 1976

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To property managers it is a nuisance, to vandals it is art. However, graffiti is an unwanted, added expense for property owners. The most important thing to understand is that graffiti attracts more graffiti. Vandals patrol a territory and leave their mark: this activity is called “tagging”. The first rule to keeping graffiti to a minimum is to remove it quickly. By denying vandals the satisfaction of leaving their “art”, they are forced to choose other targets.

All graffiti fits into three main categories: rare (one time event), random (a few times a year) and frequent.

The simplest way to deal with rare graffiti is to repaint the surface, being sure to leave no sign of previous graffiti. If the surface is not painted, test various removers and paint strippers to determine which does the best job. If you are unable to remove the graffiti yourself a professional graffiti removal specialists can usually provide a quote over the phone for the work.

When tagging starts to be a regular event, the easiest and most cost effective strategy is to use a sacrificial coating. Sacrificial coatings provide a barrier so that the graffiti cannot adhere to the protective surface. Maintenance or janitorial staff can then use a light-duty remover to clean the surface and reapply more coating. Waterborne wax and pure silicone are the best products for this application because they won't yellow, crack or haze with age like an acrylic and epoxy type coating. Silicone also provides the added benefit of being an anti-algae and anti-moss coating thereby saving the building owner pressure washing costs.

When the degree of graffiti has reached the point where it happens frequently and it is not practical to continually repaint or use a sacrificial coating, a permanent anti-graffiti coating becomes the most cost-effective solution. These coatings are usually made from two components – polyester and polyurethane – that are capable of withstanding repeated chemical attacks (removers) With these coatings on the wall, graffiti can be removed using light to medium-duty removers.

The up-front cost of such an approach is naturally higher than painting. However, taking this approach pays for itself many times over in reduced headaches and labour costs. Before investing in this type of project, speak with a building owner who has successfully removed multiple forms of graffiti from coating. Many anti-graffiti coatings are only effective with certain types of graffiti and do not provide overall protection.

The famous football coach Vince Lombardi once said, “The best defence is a good offense”. The following is a list of information necessary to formulate a plan and go on the offensive.

The first step is to identify what surfaces, such as walls, bathrooms and benches, are subject to attack. Next, determine if these surfaces are painted or unpainted. If the surfaces are painted, what type is it – granite, cement block or stucco? Finally, identify the square footage of the surface.

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With this information, you can then determine the products and services needed and the related costs. For example, if the surface is a painted wall approximately 2000 square feet in size that suffers from frequent graffiti, the solution is a permanent coating at approximately \$2 per square foot plus remover. The key is to identify the surface and determine what is the most effective way of removing the graffiti quickly.

Once it is decided how to deal with the graffiti, the question remains, “How to deal with the graffiti artist?”. Should the culprit be imprisoned? What about requiring the culprit to pay restitution? The root cause is that the vandals do not have any respect for other peoples property and this is the issue that must be addressed.

Vandals need to be made aware that painting graffiti is not appropriate social behaviour, and there is a cost to infringing on other people’s rights and property. The keyword is “awareness”. Some vandals are not aware that they are committing a crime and costing someone a significant amount of money to repair the damage they have done.

If a juvenile is caught defacing your building you should call the police and if possible the parents. But what about punishment options? Instead of going through the courts, would it work to have the teenager sign a contract that states there will be restitution in the form of labour to repair the damage and sufficient extra labour to pay for the cost of the material and the wasted time of all concerned? Maybe voluntarily community service such as working for the local community policing branch might work. Volunteer time may include: distributing brochures, typing, painting or whatever work is available to pay for the police officers’ time in having to deal with this nuisance crime. In the end, innovative punishment options may deter future crimes and deter would-be vandals.

In addition, maybe the parents should sign the contract stating that they will see to it that the juvenile does the work on time and on schedule. Regardless of age, people must be held responsible for their actions and provide restitution in such a way that they see the value of not repeating the anti-social act.

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