

TECH SHEET

EMC Insurance Companies®

Graffiti Prevention

Unfortunately, most Americans have seen graffiti somewhere in their community, whether on buildings, overpasses, train cars or other surfaces.

Both business and residential communities can be negatively impacted by graffiti. First and foremost, graffiti sends a signal that an area is not closely monitored, which can attract other forms of crime and decrease safety. Graffiti also costs communities money. Funds that could be used for schools, parks or other community improvements are instead used for graffiti cleanup. Properties in areas with significant graffiti often lose their value, and area businesses lose customers due to a perceived lack of safety.

Graffiti Prevention

In general, graffiti vandals are looking for an easy target, such as smooth, light-colored walls with easy access. Rough walls, those which are painted dark colors, and those which are clean and freshly painted are less attractive to graffiti vandals. Vandals also tend to avoid walls with painted murals. In addition to making walls less attractive, property owners should try to make it more difficult for vandals to get close to the walls by using the following methods:

- Use clinging plants, such as ivy, on vulnerable walls. This will break up the writing space and make it harder for paint to reach the wall.
- Plant short bushes in front of walls, avoiding areas near doors and windows. This makes it more difficult for people to get close to the wall.
- Place fences between business and public property. This helps people know where the boundaries are, while also making it more difficult to access the building.

Another strategy in graffiti prevention is to make vandals more visible. This can be accomplished using any of the following methods:



- Use motion-detector lighting in addition to regular lighting. If an area is usually dark, people are more likely to notice graffiti activities if it is suddenly lit up. This alone may discourage graffiti vandals.
- Remove large trees, bushes or other structures that block people's view of vandals. Stick with short bushes that keep people from getting too close to walls.
- Use pebbles around the building to create noise when people are walking. Remember, this strategy is only effective if there is someone around to hear the noise, see what is happening and react appropriately.

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Cleaning Up a Graffiti Problem

While some graffiti vandals want to damage property, most are in it for the thrill of seeing their art or tags in places where other people can see them too. By denying vandals this thrill, they will go elsewhere the next time. The most important thing property owners can do is to clean graffiti up right away.

Several studies have shown that graffiti cleaned up within 24 to 48 hours results in a nearly zero rate of reoccurrence. If vandals do strike again, it is important to remain persistent. It may take cleaning up the graffiti several times before the vandals realize it's not worth their effort, but the effort on your part will be worth it in the end.

Graffiti cleanup can be accomplished in a variety of different ways. The best method for removal is determined by the amount of graffiti, its location and the vandalized surface. The method that is often quickest and most cost-effective is to simply paint over the graffiti. If using this method, don't just follow over the outline of the tag. Instead, paint a complete square, fill it in and let the paint blend to create the idea that there's never been a tag. Many graffiti abatement personnel use solvents or chemicals to remove graffiti. This works well on brick, stucco and other natural surfaces, but is difficult to use on painted surfaces as it will remove all the paint, not just the offending graffiti. Pressure washing the surface is also commonly used.

For those areas where graffiti continues to be a problem, exposed surfaces can be sprayed or painted using a commercial wax coating. When graffiti is applied, the property owner must simply hose it off and the graffiti and wax wash away. Another application of the wax is necessary following each step.

Finally, property owners looking for a long-term solution can treat their exposed walls using a coating of an epoxy-based paint. While expensive, costing as much as \$100 per gallon, it provides for very easy cleanup for as long as 10 years.

For Additional Information

Keep America Beautiful: www.graffitihurts.org

National Crime Prevention Council:
www.ncpc.org