

Graffiti Awareness

by Officer Derek Johnson, Draper City Police Department

The Draper City Police Department reports they started seeing a major increase in graffiti in 2008. The activity on social web sites such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com have allowed graffiti artists or “taggers” to have access to graffiti paraphernalia and they are able to communicate with one another all over the world. There are also companies in Salt Lake City that support the graffiti lifestyle.

Police officers have identified more than 40 people involved with graffiti, arrested eight suspects and resolved more than 26 cases with arrests. The Police Department formed a multiagency graffiti task force working in cooperation with the Salt Lake County Sheriff’s Metro Gang Unit and Sandy Police Department.

What is graffiti? Graffiti is defined in Utah State Code (76-6-107) as: any form of unauthorized printing, writing, spraying, scratching, affixing, or inscribing on the property of another regardless of the content or nature of the material used in the commission of the act. Types of graffiti include: Tagger, Gang, Artistic and Hate Crime.

What is the effect that graffiti has on our community? Graffiti has been compared to the broken window theory. The more graffiti you have in your community, it seems more problems tend to occur in that area. It also provides a sense of insecurity to those in the community regardless of the type of graffiti. Draper has seen every type of graffiti and is seeing an increase in gang graffiti, but most of our graffiti that exists is tagger graffiti.

Is my child involved in graffiti? The most common misunderstanding of graffiti is that most people believe all graffiti is gang graffiti. There are many different types of graffiti. Graffiti artists can range from very well-dressed individuals to people who appear to be or are gang involved. Nationwide, taggers are known for carrying more weapons, which could make them as or more dangerous than a gang member.

The youngest person the police department has identified being involved in Graffiti was 12 years old and the oldest was 22 years old. Statistically, your child is more likely to be involved in gangs or graffiti if your child comes from a “broken” home. Your child will seek out the family support that is missing from their home and may join a gang or graffiti crew.

There are many items that may be associated with graffiti, but because some of the items used in graffiti crimes are household items, you should be concerned if your child is transporting any of the items listed below outside of the home, especially if these items are carried together:

1. Clothing used to conceal identity such as “hoodie” type jackets or sweatshirts, any colored bandanna, masks, or “beanie” type hats.
2. Backpacks or bags to carry graffiti items (also check to see what writing is on the bag).
3. A fat tip or paint markers that are obviously not used for test taking.
4. Spray cans (especially Krylon brand) and interchangeable spray can tips
5. Disposable plastic gloves
6. Stencils (especially larger ones)
7. Paint rollers

8. Most importantly, check your child's papers and books/binders. Almost every child involved in tagging has what is known to them as a "black book" that has their work and other known taggers.

What can citizens, visitors, and business owners do to help the graffiti problem?

1. The most important thing that anyone can do if they become the victim of any type of graffiti is to get it removed immediately.
2. Place lighting and surveillance cameras in likely graffiti areas.
3. Promote city/county ordinances that require businesses to secure their graffiti paraphernalia or prevent the sell of paraphernalia to minors.
4. Create a reputation that graffiti will not be tolerated through quick removal and reporting to police. Seek severe civil restitution when an arrest is made.
5. Make sure the graffiti is reported to the police prior to removal. The evidence in a graffiti case is the photographs of the graffiti. If there are no photographs of the graffiti it is hard for us to pursue charges on the case.

What resources are available to help remove the graffiti?

1. Draper City Public Works will remove any graffiti that is on city property after it has been reported to police. They can be contacted at (801) 576-6517.
2. Draper Courts has a community service program in which individuals that are sentenced to community service from graffiti or any other charges are available to paint over graffiti with a property owners' permission through a written waiver. Contact Derek Johnson at (801) 831-6448 if you are interested in this program.
3. Salt Lake County – Graffiti Removal Program – (801) 468-3246
4. Murray (801) 264-2614
5. West Valley (801) 963-3289
6. South Salt Lake (801) 483-6002
7. Salt Lake City (801) 972-7885
8. Sandy City (801) 568-2900
9. Midvale City (801) 567-7236

Our goal as a community is to work together to help with the current graffiti problem because it ultimately affects all of us.

If you have any other questions, information, or would like a graffiti awareness presentation, you can contact me directly at:

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