

**The Lakewood Police Department  
Special Enforcement Team's  
Anti-Graffiti Program**

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**1. What is the problem?**

Graffiti, a common but often unrecognized representation of gang affiliation, appears near or in the city of Lakewood on buildings, walls, fences, in parks, on official signs, and in other areas useful for conveying a gang's intended message. Graffiti advertises the presence of gang affiliates in the area or reflects conflict over gang territory. It can serve as a newspaper, insult and challenge rival gangs, make statements of loyalty, serve as a roll call of members, communicate messages of intended violence or death, and express grief in the form of a eulogy or obituary of fallen gang members. Graffiti is one of the first things a community will experience indicating gang presence.

The community of Lakewood has been advised to report graffiti to the police department so that the department can identify patterns of gang movement and behaviors, gain intelligence, and build cases against offenders. Community members have also been advised to remove graffiti as soon as possible. When graffiti is left in place, it adds to the deterioration of neighborhoods and may result in the reduction of property values. It may discourage families and businesses from moving into and investing in the community. Further, it invites a response from rival gangs and may lead to an increase in criminal activity in the area. In short, the presence of graffiti is harmful to a community.

In March 1992, the Special Enforcement Team (SET) was assigned the responsibility of tracking and conducting follow-up investigations of gang graffiti. Between March 1992 and March 1994, SET experienced and identified a number of problems with the current method of documentation and follow-up of graffiti reports. A more efficient system was needed due to the overwhelming number of requests for graffiti reports, photos, and follow-up which made it difficult to effectively impact the problem.

Originally, graffiti reports came from patrol report takers. On many occasions, graffiti was

reported at the same location several times before the property owner was first notified to remove it. There was also a delay in following up graffiti reports while waiting for a determination to be made on whether or not the graffiti was gang-related. (City ordinance required all gang graffiti to be removed within ten days.) Also, there were many incidents where a crime scene investigator (CSI) was sent needlessly to photograph graffiti which had already been reported and photographed, in some cases more than once.

## **2. For whom was it a problem?**

The problem of graffiti affects the following:

- \* The business community
- \* Prospective business owners, operators, and investors
- \* Clients of businesses
- \* Insurance companies and policy holders
- \* Homeowners
- \* Jefferson County School District R-1
- \* City departments: Community Resources; Traffic Engineering; Public Works; Code Enforcement Section
- \* Citizens who enjoy the use of municipal parks
- \* Municipal Court including City prosecutors and support personnel
- \* Initial police report takers
- \* Crime scene investigators (CSI)
- \* Special Enforcement Team agents (SET)
- \* Police Communications Section
- \* Advertisement bench companies
- \* Public Service Company of Colorado
- \*\* U.S. West Communications
- 
- \* Regional Transportation District (RTD) - bus transportation service

## **3. Who was affected by the problem and how were they affected?**

**Businesses** expend costly hours of labor removing graffiti and repairing damage caused to building exterior and interior surfaces. (An example of interior damage by graffiti is frequently seen in restaurant and fast food establishments' restroom facilities). Companies which sell

advertising space on benches expend time and money to clean up property. Businesses often experience the need to invest in elaborate and expensive exterior landscaping to discourage painting of building surfaces. Increased night lighting is an added expense as well as investing in security systems or additional security personnel. Ultimately, businesses often suffer loss of their customer base due to the intimidation factor of graffiti on their property.

**The city** is impacted in a variety of ways. As businesses experience loss of customers and retail sales, the city experiences a decrease in its retail sales tax revenues, monies needed to provide citizen services. A city with unsightly graffiti may give prospective business owners and investors the impression that the community has no pride, and a state of decay may be present -- business owners may take their operation to another community. Similarly, new families are less likely to move into a community where neighborhoods and school property display graffiti and other vandalism. **The school district** experiences significant cost of repair. Numerous **City of Lakewood departments** are impacted by the loss of time and money expended to identify and clean up graffiti.

**Citizens'** perceptions of their safety are diminished as the media reports metro-wide gang activity and as citizens see the presence of graffiti in their neighborhoods, on school campuses, and in city parks, and interpret it to mean that potentially harmful gangs exist and operate in their community.

Police-services are consequently impacted by the time and resources spent responding to calls concerning graffiti, documentation, photographic processing, follow up, surveillance, and enforcement of the gang graffiti ordinance. The Lakewood Police Department has experienced confusing and costly duplication of reports and crime scene processing. These wasted resources in turn affect our ability to respond to other calls for service.

**Municipal court** dockets and city prosecutors are impacted from the need to process those charged with violation of the municipal gang graffiti ordinance.

**Insurance companies** are impacted by claims initiated by their clients, leading to insurers paying increasingly higher (and, in some cases, prohibitive) premiums.

**Service providers** such as U.S. West Communications and Public Service Company of Colorado are continually repairing damage to utility service boxes. The Regional Transportation District suffers damage from graffiti at bus stop shelters and to interiors of buses where graffiti is written, scratched, or painted on surfaces and where windows are etched with sharp instruments -- all of which affects RTD's insurance premiums and operating costs.

**4. How did the department handle the problem in the past?**

Formerly, uniformed agents responded to calls for service regarding graffiti reports, and agents made self-initiated graffiti reports.

**5. What information has been collected about the problem?**

Computer data is available concerning graffiti reports for the years of 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, and 1994 to-date. (See attached gang-related crime report for the years 1991, 1992, and 1993 which includes information regarding gang graffiti.)

**6. Were there any difficulties in obtaining this information?**

We did not encounter any difficulties obtaining data concerning graffiti issues.

**7. What was the goal of the problem-solving effort?**

**Primary Goal:**

- \* The design and implementation of an all-community efficient approach to confront and control the graffiti problem in the city of Lakewood, Colorado

**Secondary Goals:**

- \* To coordinate this effort with other city departments

- \* To develop and coordinate community graffiti eradication programs
- \* To eliminate the duplication of reports
- \* To better utilize sworn patrol personnel
- \* To utilize citizen volunteers to perform certain functions in the documentation process
- \* To educate the public about the negative ramifications of graffiti

**8. What strategies were developed to reach that goal?**

**GRAFFITI REPORTING PROCESS OUTLINE**

On May 1, 1994, the department implemented its new "Anti Graffiti Program" of identification and removal. (See enclosed "Anti Graffiti Program" brochure.)

- \* All graffiti reports are taken by the Special Enforcement Team. All requests for graffiti reports are forwarded to the "Graffiti Report Request" box located on the SET desk. SET takes all photographs of graffiti, except in cases of extensive graffiti displays where a CSI may be assigned.
- \* All graffiti reports are recorded in the "Graffiti Report Log" located at the SET desk. The log is divided by police beats. All photos of graffiti are kept in folders divided by beat, also kept at the SET desk. (This log is in the process of being computerized.)
- \* When SET agents take the initial crime report, they provide an "Anti Graffiti Program" brochure to the property owner at the time of that contact. The brochure explains to the property owner:
  - Information about types of graffiti (gang and tagger)
  - The importance of speedy graffiti removal
  - The importance of reporting graffiti to the police

- Who to contact to have graffiti removed if owners are unable to remove it themselves {i.e., the Graffiti Hotline removal assistance program)
  
- \* Whenever SET takes a graffiti report and photo, the SET agent writes the case report number across the graffiti with a large black marker to show that it has been reported.
  
- \* Graffiti located by employees of other City departments, i.e., Public Works, Community Resources, Traffic Engineering, etc., is to be photographed by that department. The photo is to be provided to SET with an attached graffiti report form containing the date, time, location of graffiti, name of graffiti photographer, and whether or not the graffiti was removed.
  
- \* SET then completes a graffiti report and conducts a follow-up investigation. This reduces the amount of time expended to remove graffiti from City-owned property once it has been discovered.
  
- \* When SET completes the initial crime report, photographs the graffiti, and presents the property owner with removal information, a recheck of the property will occur in 10 days. If the graffiti has not been removed at the 10-day check, SET notifies the City's Code Enforcement Section via a copy of the report. Code Enforcement then recontacts the property owner with another "Anti Graffiti Brochure" and reemphasizes the importance of speedy graffiti removal, the existence of the municipal gang graffiti ordinance, and offers assistance in removal. If the gang graffiti has not been removed within another 10 days, the ordinance can be enforced.

When the graffiti is tagger (i.e., not gang-related) the gang graffiti ordinance is not in effect, and removal is at the discretion of the property owner. In this case, City employees strongly encourage property owners to remove it by explaining how

tagger graffiti also presents a picture of uncaring and decay, and impacts the property owner's investment and the community in a variety of negative ways.

- \* Monthly and yearly reports are to be compiled containing:
  - The number of graffiti reports taken (broken down by gang and tagger)
  - The number of graffiti-related arrests
  - The number of removals completed by the volunteer graffiti removal program
  - The number of volunteers, time spent, and estimated cost involved in the graffiti removal
  - The number of volunteers, time spent, arrests made via volunteer investigations, and estimated cost saved by using citizen volunteer surveillance teams (CSTs). (See discussion of CSTs below.)

These reports are to be distributed to the Mayor and City Council, all City department heads, the Public Information Officer, news media, volunteer graffiti removal program participants, and police department supervisors.

All data collected monthly and yearly will be frequently publicized. It is felt that publicizing the existence and effectiveness of this partnership between the police department and the community will accomplish important objectives -- to increase citizen awareness and to encourage volunteer participation in this critical community problem.

### **CITIZEN POLICE ACADEMY (CPA) GRADUATES**

With the supervision of SET, graduates of the Lakewood Police Department's Citizen Police Academy participate in the graffiti removal program. These volunteers undergo training to

take graffiti reports and photos, contact and distribute removal information brochures to property owners, and recheck "graffitied" property. In addition, in an effort to identify and apprehend offenders, CPA graduates receive training on low-level surveillance techniques, targeting graffiti locations.

## **UNITED STATES POSTAL CARRIERS**

Effective July 12, 1994, a pilot program utilizing postal carriers has been implemented. Postal carriers are generating graffiti reports in two of the five Lakewood ZIP code areas, 80227 and 80232. If this pilot program is successful, it will be expanded to the other ZIP code areas in the city. The department is encouraged because the first week of the program generated 28 graffiti reports.

### **9. What agencies assisted the police department in achieving the goal?**

- \* City of Lakewood:
  - Community Resources
  - Traffic Engineering
  - Public Works
  - Code Enforcement
- \* Graduates from the Lakewood Police Department's Citizen Police Academy
- \* Chamber of Commerce Serving West Jefferson County
- <sup>n</sup>\* United States Postal Service
- \* Volunteer "Anti Graffiti Program" community participants

### **10. Was the goal accomplished?**

This program was implemented on May 1, 1994. While the "Anti Graffiti Program" has been operative for a short time, results to-date are extremely encouraging. The enclosed police department memo dated July 12, 1994, reflects significant time and cost savings experienced

since the program's start-up date. (For example, the department has experienced a reduction in time agents have spent responding to calls for service, taking reports, photographing, coordinating removal, surveillance of graffiti locations, and enforcing the gang graffiti ordinance.)

Coordinated participation by City departments, community volunteers, graduates of the Citizens Police Academy, U.S. Postal Carriers, and others, promises to continue to enhance the program by confronting in a united effort the harm and damage that our community experiences from gang and tagger graffiti.

A highlight of the program has been the resulting enthusiastic team effort between the Lakewood Police Department, the Special Enforcement Team, City departments, and representatives from many levels of the community.

**GANG-RELATED CRIMES**

	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>
ASSAULT	23	40	37
Stabbings	0	2	1
Drive-by shooting	1	13	0
SHOOTINGS	0	1	6
AUTO THEFT	12	23	7
BURGLARY	8	7	7
CONCEALED WEAPON	3	9	11
CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE	0	5	3
CRIMINAL MISCHIEF	8	7	18
DISOBEYING	0	5	2
DISCHARGE WEAPON	1	1	0
DISORDERLY CONDUCT	20	20	18
FALSE INFORMATION	6	6	4
FELONY MENACING	7	13	13
GRAFFITI	82	113	126
HARASSMENT	15	16	27
KIDNAPPING	0	0	0
ILLEGAL WEAPON	1	6	4
INTERFERENCE	0	3	1
HOMICIDE ATTEMPT	0	0	1
MENACING	5	3	1
RECKLESS ENDANGERMENT	3	2	2
ROBBERY	3	8	18
SEXUAL ASSAULT	2	0	0
SHOPLIFTING	15	6	8
THEFT	4	14	7
THEFT BY RECEIVING	6	13	10
TRESPASS PROPERTY	25	15	2
TRESPASS VEHICLE	11	0	14
	247	386	384

**LAKWOOD POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Gary R. Barbour, Captain  
Patrol Division

**VIA:** Chain of Command

**FROM:** Dallas Riedesel, Sergeant  
Special Enforcement Team

**DATE:** July 12, 1994

**SUBJECT:** Graffiti Activity Report

<b><u>ACTIVITY</u></b>	<b><u>MONTH TOTALS</u></b>	<b><u>YEAR-TO-DATE TOTALS</u></b>
	<b><u>June</u></b>	<b><u>(beginning 04-01-94)</u></b>
Gang graffiti reports	15	47
Tagger graffiti reports	28	88
Number of arrests	3	21
Number of reports taken by volunteers	83	182
Time spent by volunteers taking reports (in hours)	25.0	56.7
Number of reports from other City departments	13	22
Number of removals by volunteers	0	6
Number of volunteers involved in removals	0	38
Removal volunteer time (in hours)	0	30.5
Cost of graffiti removal	0	\$64
Volunteer Surveillance Team activity	0	2
Number of volunteers involved in VST activity	0	4
Time spent (in hours)	0	16
*Cost saved w/VST & reports taken by volunteers (\$19.55/hr)	\$488.75	\$1,421.29

\*Mid-range agent salary.

Statistics do not reflect reports generated by U.S. Postal Service.