



TIDY
Northern
Ireland

TIDY Northern Ireland
Our Take On...
Graffiti

Our Take On... Written By: TIDY Northern Ireland, PO BOX 210, NEWTOWNARDS, BT23 8WY
Phone: 029 91 800725, E-mail: patricia.mackey@tidynorthernireland.org

This discussion paper sets out TIDY Northern Ireland's position regarding graffiti. The environmental problems of graffiti are highlighted, the associated costs are examined and potential solutions to the problem are explored together with TIDY Northern Ireland's recommendations on what needs to be done in Northern Ireland to rectify this issue.

Executive Summary

The term graffiti refers to any marking illegally made on walls and other surfaces. There are a variety of styles of graffiti including extensive 'art' pieces, tags, scribbles, scratching and etchings. Graffiti can be costly to remove and its presence often leads to other anti-social behaviour problems. There are a number of potential solutions to counteract graffiti which should best be used as a combination approach rather than as a single solution.

✍ Reducing the Rewards to Offenders

- ✍ Detecting graffiti rapidly and routinely;
- ✍ Removing graffiti rapidly.

✍ Increasing the Risk of Detection

- ✍ Increasing observation of graffiti-prone locations;
- ✍ Increased use of CCTV security systems;
- ✍ Conducting publicity campaigns.

✍ Enforcement Action

- ✍ PSNI should be encouraged to move graffiti up its agenda.

✍ Prevention of Graffiti Attacks

- ✍ Vandal-proofing graffiti prone locations;
- ✍ Controlling access to graffiti-prone locations.

✍ Education

✍ Diversion

Introduction

Historically the term graffiti referred to the inscriptions and figure drawings found on the walls of ancient sepulchres and ruins. Usage of the word has evolved to mean any inscription on a surface that can be regarded as vandalism and was done without the permission of the owner.

The first example of 'modern style graffiti' survives in the ancient Greek City of Ephesus (modern day Turkey) and appears to advertise prostitution. The Romans carved graffiti onto their own walls and monuments and examples of their work can be seen in Egypt as well as Pompeii where the eruption of Vesuvius preserved it to give an insight into street life.



Not only Greeks and Romans produced graffiti. Examples of graffiti can be traced back to the Mayans, the Vikings, ancient Irish, French and there is Chinese graffiti on the Great Wall of China. Although, essentially cave paintings were the original graffiti.

In Northern Ireland graffiti can be found everywhere, for examples walls (paint aerosols can be used on almost all surfaces), bus shelters, public phones, road signs, pavements, public conveniences and all types of public transport. Materials used to execute this type of graffiti include marker pens, paint, aerosol spray paint, chalk, knives or stones (for scratching), crayons, ball-points etc.

It can be argued that graffiti offers an outlet of expression for the artists, and perhaps enlivens otherwise bland urban settings. However, most people living and working in affected areas, and especially whose property is affected, are concerned with the removal and prevention of graffiti. Graffiti is often the first element in a spiral of decline. If graffiti is not removed others will feel free to add to it. The financial cost of cleaning up graffiti is enormous and is difficult to eradicate completely.

What is Graffiti?

Graffiti (*pl.* from *graffito*, 'to scratch' *Ital.*) describes drawings, scratches, writing or patterns painted or scratched on walls or other surfaces. Graffiti is illegal in Northern Ireland and the law considers it an act of vandalism and criminal damage. Graffiti today ranges from simple, one-colour monikers (tags) repeated on many surfaces to complex compositions of several colours. Across most of Northern Ireland graffiti is not a major problem. However, it is much more common in areas such as cities, large towns and high-density residential areas, and where it does occur, it can act as a drain on public resources.

Removing Graffiti

Simply painting over the marks can repair graffiti damage, however this has its disadvantages as it often provides a blank canvas to encourage further attacks. Generally chemical agents are needed to remove graffiti. The agents used depend on the type of marker used to execute the graffiti and the surface, or substrate, it is written on. It is important to use agents that will not damage the underlying surface or make the marks look worse, and in addition do not harm or pollute the environment. Preservation of the substrate is particularly important when removing graffiti from historic surfaces.

The True Cost of Graffiti

Few graffiti offenders are apprehended, and some change their methods and locations in response to possible apprehension and clean ups. As with most forms of vandalism, graffiti is not routinely reported to police or councils. There is much confusion around who is responsible for taking action against graffiti artists.

The legislation in Northern Ireland is severely inadequate to effectively deal with this problem. Under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 councils are given powers to remove or obliterate any graffiti, which in their opinion is detrimental to the amenity of any land in their district. Under this legislation the council can serve a notice to the person responsible for the graffiti requiring it to be removed within 14 days of the notice being served. The councils also have the power to remove graffiti from their property and recover the costs from the responsible person. However it is often unclear who the responsible person is and it is often cheaper not to pursue reclaiming monies owed. The only method to prosecute a graffiti artist is to use criminal damage legislation. TIDY Northern Ireland is not aware of any successful prosecutions, or even prosecution attempts, in Northern Ireland.

Graffiti is not an isolated problem. It is often related to other crime and disorder problems, including:

- ✍ Public disorder, such as littering, public urination, loitering and other anti social behaviour;
- ✍ Shoplifting of materials needed for graffiti, such as spray paints and markers;
- ✍ Sectarian graffiti often conveys threats and identifies turf boundaries;
- ✍ Intimidation of residents and workers;
- ✍ Property destruction, such as broken windows or slashed bus and train seats.



Research consistently show that serious graffiti artists are discouraged from marking very well kept areas and it is more often areas suffering from neglect that are affected by intense graffiti.

Options to Reduce Graffiti in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland the problem of graffiti does not fall within the remit of one organisation and therefore a co-ordinated approach between a number of statutory bodies is required to adequately eliminate the issue. TIDY Northern Ireland recommends the following actions need to be taken:

✍ Reducing the Rewards to Offenders

Rapid identification and removal of graffiti has been shown to reduce its occurrence. This approach directly addresses the motives of many offenders by reducing the notoriety associated with graffiti's visibility. This process involves actively monitoring backed up by rapid removal.

✍ Detecting graffiti rapidly and routinely

TIDY Northern Ireland recommends that areas prone to graffiti should be systematically monitored to increase reported incidents. Quick detection of graffiti provides better information for developing effective interventions. A graffiti database should be used to track incidents and illuminate patterns, and identify chronic offenders.

✍ Removing graffiti rapidly

The most effective method of deterring graffiti is consistently getting rid of it, and doing so quickly. TIDY Northern Ireland recommends graffiti is removed within 24 hrs of it appearing to limit the buzz graffitiists get from people seeing their work.

Property owners/ tenants and businesses should also be encouraged to have more civic responsibility by taking the lead in removing graffiti from their properties as soon as it appears. This would further reduce the reward to offenders and help eliminate the 'buzz' generated by this type of graffiti.

✍ Increasing the Risk of Detection

Because graffiti offenders usually operate in darkness, where there is little chance of being seen, few are apprehended. Increasing the likelihood of their being detected increases the risk of apprehension. This can be done in a number of ways:

✍ Increasing observation of graffiti-prone locations;

The likelihood of detecting graffiti offenders can be increased by installing, upgrading or maintaining lighting. In addition shrubbery or trees that conceal areas can be removed. Other methods to increase observation involve design, such as eliminating blind spots of underpasses, or park paths, installing windows or building car parks within view of residences and designing spacious areas with good visibility.

Observation of graffiti-prone locations can also be increased through use of police, security personnel, Neighbourhood Watch, and employees.

✍ Increased use of CCTV security systems;

Observation of graffiti-prone locations can be undertaken using CCTV which can either be fixed or portable. CCTV can be used to deter potential offenders, apprehend offenders in the act, and provide evidence in court. It is important that CCTV systems are not used in place of all other solutions. There

is a danger that CCTV can reduce vigilance as it may create a false sense of security and lead to enforcement resources being deployed elsewhere.

- ✎ **Conducting publicity campaigns**
On their own, publicity campaigns are of limited effectiveness. However, when combined with other strategies they can have positive effects. Probably the type of campaign that is likely to have the biggest impact involves community clean up days to eliminate graffiti, litter and other signs of disorder.

Publicity campaigns can also focus on the importance of discouraging the use of graffiti in advertising and art exhibits, as well as media coverage of graffiti, recognising that such attention serves to further contribute to the notoriety graffiti offenders seek.

✎ **Enforcement Action**

Any enforcement action needs to be coupled with education and diversion. Anti-graffiti strategies have traditionally focused on enforcement and crime prevention. The lack of prosecutions shows that this is not the most effective method of reducing the amount of graffiti present. In England there is some evidence that over enforcement can actually make things worse, especially for the 'serious' graffiti artists. Many graffiti artists simply see enforcement as another challenge which creates a greater sense of achievement for successful graffiti. Enforcement action is perhaps more useful for people who 'Tag'. Enforcement is an important part of reducing graffiti, but it is important that it is used along side other methods rather than by itself. The PSNI should be encouraged to move graffiti further up its agenda as legislatively it is classed as 'criminal damage' and they are the ones with the enforcement powers.

There is a worrying website that encourages graffiti artists' to graffiti in dangerous locations (that are hard to reach), take a photo and the 'art' is then displayed on the website. There needs to be increased penalties for this type of criminal damage. It may be worthwhile investigating if charges can be brought against such websites that encourage this type of criminal damage.

✎ **Prevention of Graffiti Attacks**

Measures that reduce the opportunities for graffiti art should be integrated into planning legislation and architectural design. This would include incorporating restricted access, increased chance of surveillance and changes to the design of building stock.

- ✎ **Vandal-proofing graffiti prone locations;**
Graffiti offenders can be thwarted by vandal-proofing vulnerable surfaces in vulnerable areas, a process that often involves modifying surface textures. Anti-graffiti coverings and surfaces make surfaces easy to clean, difficult to write on, or both.
- ✎ **Controlling access to graffiti-prone locations;**
Controlling access to graffiti-prone locations physically bars offenders from vulnerable areas. In some cases, signs have been moved out of reach of vandals, while bus stops and other frequently vandalised targets have been relocated.

Environmental design to limit access to graffiti surfaces can be best incorporated into planning and construction, but may also be adapted to existing structures. Access to residential or commercial properties may be

restricted to those with resident or employee identification cards, while visitor access may be controlled through entry phones.

Similar to environmental design, situational design reduces the opportunities for graffiti. The absence of toilets, seating, fast food, and lockers in train/bus stations effectively discourages potential offenders from loitering. Since graffiti often takes place late at night. Limiting hours reduces opportunities for vandalism at times when there are typically few people about to deter the offender or witness the offence.

Education

Educating young people to the risks and consequences of becoming involved in graffiti is an important part of the solution. Community education is likely to be the most effective method to counteract graffiti, if implemented in tandem with practical measures such as removal and enforcement. Education is needed to include businesses and other community groups to encourage about graffiti enough so that people are moved to act on the problem. Education of graffiti artists and those likely to become graffiti artists is extremely important.

To prevent historical surfaces from being attacked, a good place to start may be to instil a sense of pride in the building or surface, and the attitude that it belongs to the entire community, including the youth of that community.

Educating or changing the attitudes of hardened graffiti artists is likely to be difficult. Most serious graffiti artists regard their work as art. Negotiation and compromise offer the best solution.

Diversion

Legal walls where writers can display their work is one example of a diversionary approach. However, there is limited evidence to suggest they actually reduce graffiti from taking place elsewhere. Furthermore, they have to be managed effectively and be properly situated or else they can make a community look worse.

Summary of TIDY Northern Ireland Recommendations

Graffiti is a relevant issue in Northern Ireland and must be dealt with using adequate resources to eradicate the problem completely. Below is the full list of recommendations TIDY Northern Ireland feel need to be implemented across Northern Ireland:

- Recommendation 1:** Reduce rewards to offenders by detecting and removing graffiti as soon as it appears. This should involve councils, businesses, tenants and home owners.
- Recommendation 2:** Increase detection by better planning, more patrols and using CCTV surveillance.
- Recommendation 3:** Enforcement should be used along side other methods to reduce graffiti such as education and diversions. PSNI should be encouraged to move graffiti further up its agenda.
- Recommendation 4** Prevent graffiti by using graffiti proof surfaces and restricting access to vulnerable locations.
- Recommendation 5:** Education should be used to dissuade children from tagging and highlight the risks and consequences.
- Recommendation 6:** Activities to channel the interests and energy of young people into more positive and productive outcomes should be developed.