

LOCAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS GRAFFITI

Preserving Our Magnificent Garden

The following Activity Report of the 2012-2013 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury), prepared in accordance with the *California Penal Code, Sections 925 and 928*, pertains to the problem of graffiti in Santa Barbara County (County). The Santa Barbara region has deservedly been given the title of the “American Riviera” for a simple reason: It is a magnificent garden in which imaginative architecture recalls its Spanish origins. Many of the buildings, particularly within the City of Santa Barbara itself, seem to make one feel as if they were truly in Barcelona. However, there is another commonality between Barcelona and Santa Barbara that is much less attractive—the unfortunate presence of graffiti.

Much of the graffiti in Spain and other European countries consists of political and social statements, continuing a tradition that has existed for millennia. We who live in the County see very little political graffiti, but too often the kind we do see has a more sinister aspect—gang activity.

Graffiti is the malicious defacement of real or personal property with “any unauthorized inscription, word, figure, mark, or design, that is written, marked, etched, scratched, drawn, or painted” on property (*California Penal Code, Section 594*). It can range from a simple word or phrase to artistic and elaborate depictions. One increasingly common type of graffiti, normally done in one color, is usually a sign of gang activity that is designed as a warning to members of other gangs that an area is “our territory,” not to be entered with impunity.

Graffiti is more than an aesthetic problem. It is a blight that affects the desirability of a community and, if left unchecked, it becomes a symbol of defiance. The factors giving rise to graffiti are multi-faceted and vary from place to place and time to time. Local communities take the issue seriously and are making strides to address it. It is important to be aware of these efforts and the Jury summarizes them in this Activity Report. This report also provides contact information for reporting graffiti in various jurisdictions around the County. As with any crime, the public is encouraged to call 911 to report an act of graffiti or other vandalism in progress.¹

CITY OF BUELLTON

When graffiti is reported to the Buellton Police Department, the City’s Public Works Department is notified and removes it. Expenses are paid out of the City’s General Fund. The public is encouraged to report graffiti concerns by calling the Buellton Police Department at (805) 686-8150.

CITY OF CARPINTERIA

At one time, Carpinteria had as many as 350 incidents of graffiti activity per month. Now, however, that number has been reduced to 20 to 25 per month. This decrease is

¹Referenced phone numbers can be found in the table at the end of this report.

attributed to a variety of economic and demographic factors as well as the prevention and eradication efforts of the City and its citizens. All vehicles are equipped with graffiti removal kits and workers have been trained in their use. Carpinteria has a rewards program for the arrest and conviction of perpetrators. The public is encouraged to report graffiti concerns by calling the City's Graffiti Hotline at (805) 684-5405, Extension 511.

CITY OF GOLETA

Goleta has mobilized an informal group of volunteers who, for the last 15 years, have made it their responsibility to remove 2,000 instances of graffiti per year from private and commercial properties within the City. The paint used is donated by volunteers. The key to the success of the volunteer crew is that they quickly clean up graffiti on all surfaces, including under bridges. The public is encouraged to report graffiti by calling the Graffiti Hotline at (805) 968-6769.

CITY OF GUADALUPE

Guadalupe recognizes that it has a problem with graffiti, especially during summer months when school is not in session. Typically, five to ten acts of graffiti per week are reported and responsibility for removal is shared among City departments, depending upon where the graffiti is found. On private property, the owner is notified to remove graffiti. The Police Department photographs and keeps track of the graffiti and seeks restitution when the offender is apprehended. The public is encouraged to report graffiti concerns by calling the Guadalupe Public Works Department at (805) 343-1340, Extension 5.

CITY OF LOMPOC

An employee of Lompoc's Police Department looks for and documents graffiti, which a Sanitation Department employee then removes. If graffiti is located on private property, the Sanitation Department removes it if the owner does not. Local religious and service organizations also remove graffiti at their own expense. The public is encouraged to report graffiti by calling (805) 736-2341, Extension 6143. More information on the City's graffiti removal program is available at cityoflom poc.com².

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

The City of Santa Barbara receives approximately 30 to 40 calls each day reporting graffiti. The Public Works Department uses one full-time employee and one part-time employee to remove graffiti from City property. This team has a truck supplied with high-pressure water equipment for graffiti removal and with most city paint colors for repainting. For graffiti reported on private property, the property owner is notified of an obligation under an ordinance³ to remove it.

Citizens can also assist in efforts to address graffiti by joining the Adopt-A-Block Program through an organization called "Looking Good Santa Barbara" which can be reached at lookinggoodsb.com⁴.

²<http://www.cityoflom poc.com/SW/Graffiti.htm> (last visited April 18, 2013)

³ Santa Barbara Municipal Code chapter 9.66

⁴ <http://www.santabarbaraca.gov/Recycling-Trash/clean-community/index.html> (last visited April 18, 2013)

The City has a memorandum of understanding with the Union Pacific Railroad for the clean-up of graffiti on the railroad's right of way. The graffiti crew is responsible for removal in a timely manner and the City invoices the railroad for the cost of this work. The graffiti crew costs over \$100,000 per year to operate and about one-third of this cost is recovered from Union Pacific.

The public is encouraged to report graffiti by calling the City's Graffiti Hotline at (805) 897-2513.

CITY OF SANTA MARIA

Graffiti removal is the responsibility of the Parks Department and the costs are paid out of the General Fund. One employee works 32 hours per week exclusively in removing graffiti, including from private property with the owner's permission. The City contracts with a comprehensive web-based system provider called "Graffiti Tracker" which records all graffiti. It costs \$3,000 annually for this system, which is designed to help identify, track, prosecute and seek restitution from graffiti vandals. The public is encouraged to report graffiti problems by calling the City at (805) 925-0951, Extension 667.

CITY OF SOLVANG

The City's Maintenance Department removes graffiti on public buildings. When a perpetrator is convicted, restitution is required. Private property owners are responsible for graffiti removal. The public is encouraged to report graffiti by calling the Sheriff's Department Substation at (805) 686-5000.

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

The County has a graffiti abatement ordinance, which is codified in Santa Barbara County Code chapter 47. The California Department of Transportation coordinates graffiti removal and schedules coordination with other projects along U.S. Highway 101. Citizens residing in the unincorporated areas of the County are encouraged to report graffiti by calling the County Public Works Department at (805) 568-3000.

CONCLUSION

Even minor occurrences of graffiti must be handled immediately or they will compound and become a larger problem that can have a significant negative effect on the quality of life in the area. Many communities struggle with this continuing problem, but we in Santa Barbara County need not. We need only support local programs to combat graffiti, and with the public's assistance, we can diminish this societal problem.

Graffiti Reporting Phone Numbers

Location	Contact	Phone number
Buellton	Police Department	805-686-8150
Carpinteria	Graffiti Hotline	805-684-5405 x511
Goleta	Graffiti Hotline	805-968-6769
Guadalupe	Public Works	805-343-1340 x5
Lompoc	Graffiti Hotline	805-736-2341 x6143
Santa Barbara	Graffiti Hotline	805-897-2513
Santa Maria	Graffiti Hotline	805-925-0951 x667
Solvang	Sheriff's Department	805-686-5000
Unincorporated County	County Public Works	805-568-3000

Under *California Penal Code Section 933.05* this report does not require a response.