

**NOMINATION FOR THE
HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE
IN
PROBLEM SOLVING AWARD
1995**

"Tag - A - Tagger"
Graffiti Vandalism Reduction Program

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"TAG - A - TAGGER"
A STRATEGY TO REDUCE GRAFFITI CRIMES
AND RELATED GANG OFFENSES

What was the Problem, and whom did it effect?

Last year, local and state governments, as well as private and public companies spent approximately \$7 million removing graffiti from properties. The City of Scottsdale is not immune from this type of vandalism, evidenced by the abatement (removal of graffiti) of 727 graffiti incidents by the City of Scottsdale Code Enforcement Division in fiscal year 1993-94. The problem, however, continues to grow. It is estimated that Code Enforcement will abate twice as many (1,500) graffiti cases in fiscal year 1994-95. Graffiti vandalism can directly effect the quality of life for all the citizens of Scottsdale, and can be directly related to property values in Scottsdale.

How did the department handle this problem in the past

Traditionally, graffiti vandalism reports were handled by patrol officers as a low priority call for service. The closed reports were sent to the Investigations Section and filed in with other cases. Currently, the actual graffiti damage is eradicated by the city's Code Enforcement Division. They operate a 24 hour reporting line that citizens can call with locations of graffiti damage. They then remove the graffiti within a 24 hour period. This program has been in effect for approximately 2 years.

What information was collected about the problem and were there difficulties in getting the information?

The city estimated the costs, to be approximately \$150 per graffiti incident, to report and eradicate the graffiti damage. These costs include the Police Department manpower and resources, along with abatement costs by the Code Enforcement Division, which includes the salary and benefits of a full time abatement employee. It was difficult to accurately estimate the costs of eradicating the graffiti, as the most of the paint was donated and the painting over was done by some of the area home owners associations. The city was able to accurately estimate the city staff hours needed and translate that into a monetary figure. Also, there was a reluctance on the part of many local citizens and business owners to report minor incidents of graffiti to their property to the police prior to painting out the damage.

The Police Department began gathering information on the costs of taking a police report, including taking Polaroid photos of the damage for intelligence purposes. Polaroid photos were used to gather information on similar graffiti styles and "Tag names". This enabled detectives to distinguish between traditional "gang" graffiti, and "tagger" graffiti, through education and analysis of the photos. The Police Department also provided training and photographic resources to the Code Enforcement abatement employee to enable him to complete and photographs of graffiti not already reported, prior to the removal.

What was the goal of the problem solving effort, and what strategies were developed to reach the goals?

In an effort to decrease the number of graffiti related crimes, a multi-dimensional, aggressive approach to suppressing graffiti in Scottsdale was initiated. The program was abeted by "Tag-a-Tagger". The program approaches the graffiti problem through intelligence gathering, directed enforcement, public participation, public education, and a high profile media campaign.

This program is centered around a graffiti information rewards program. This portion consists of an information telephone line (320-TAGD) for citizens to call and give anonymous (if desired) information about persons or locations for graffiti damage to public, private or business properties. The line is operated much like other "silent witness" style phone lines. A person calling with information is given a control number by the call taker, if they wish to remain anonymous. The phone line is assigned to a cellular phone, which will be carried by the on-call Youth Intervention Unit detective. This will allow the detective to receive the information first hand, and immediately screen the information. If the information used assists with the identification and prosecution of a graffiti vandal, the "witness" will normally receive a cash reward of up to \$250, though the amount was increase in a recent hate crime related incident up to \$1,000. The distribution of rewards is supervised by a governing board consisting of three police employees and two members of the community. Additionally, the Police Department anticipates being able to fund the rewards entirely through private, community and business donations, and public grants.

What agencies or businesses helped the Police Department in achieving the goals?

One local Scottsdale realtor, provided initial funds and Maricopa County Attorney's Office has given \$5,000 in RICO funds to the program. Other money has been collected through fund raising efforts of local businesses and a golf tournament sponsored by the Scottsdale Police Department. The success of the "Tag-A-Tagger" program is directly related to the monetary and information support we receive from the community.

Part two of the program includes public and business education. Some merchants may be unaware that spray paint and markers they stock in their stores are the instruments being used to deface area properties. These items are either being sold to or stolen by graffiti vandals. Businesses that sell spray paint and/or markers are being urged to do the following:

- 1) Do not sell spray paint to minors (this is a violation of state law).
- 2) Place spray paint and markers in store areas where they can be monitored by employees. This will deter theft of these items and make consideration of an ordinance requiring the secure storage of spray paint and markers unnecessary.
- 3) Report any graffiti you see to the City's 24-hour graffiti removal line or call the Scottsdale Police Department to make a police report.

The Police Chief of Scottsdale has sent a letter to all Scottsdale school students asking for their help in combating graffiti. The letter introduces students to the "Tag-A-Tagger" program and explains the serious nature of graffiti vandalism. It is

anticipated that this letter will generate information from students on graffiti vandals known to them. (See attached letter).

In addition, the Police Department has printed more than 1,000 "Tag-A-Taggef" posters for distribution to Scottsdale's businesses and schools. The posters encourage citizens to call the graffiti information hotline to report those responsible for graffiti crimes. A Scottsdale printer, donated the poster printing.

Was the goal of the program accomplished?

The goal of the program has been to reduce the amount of graffiti damage in the city and increase community participation and awareness of the problem. The business community has responded to the program enthusiastically, as shown by total reward fund contributions exceeding \$10,000 and rewards of \$400 being distributed, in just the first two months of program operation. The rewards are the result of citizens who have responded by calling in graffiti incidents, both as the damage has occurred and after the fact, so perpetrators could be arrested and charged and the damage could be eradicated.

There has not been adequate time for statistical data to be collected on the number of graffiti incidents occurring in Scottsdale since the inception of the program, however the employees responsible for graffiti enforcement and abatement fully anticipate a decrease in graffiti vandalism.