

## What is Graffiti?

Generally, graffiti can be defined as words, figures, letters or drawings scribbled, scratched or sprayed on a surface with or without the consent of the owner of the property on which they are placed.

Applying or creating graffiti is an offence under the Town of Wainwright's Nuisance Bylaw 2011-04. Section 2.3 states:

- No person shall apply or create graffiti.

The specified penalty under the Nuisance Bylaw is \$500.<sup>00</sup>.

Property owners are responsible for cleaning and getting rid of graffiti on their property. Section 2.1 of the Nuisance Bylaw states:

- No person being the owner, agent, lessee or occupier of any property within the Town shall permit such property, or the activities upon such property, to be or become a nuisance or be in an unsightly condition.

The specified penalty for failing to clean up graffiti is \$150.<sup>00</sup>.

The offence of Mischief found in the Criminal Code of Canada gives the RCMP the power to lay charges for graffiti related incidents.

Section 430(1) Criminal Code of Canada states everyone commits mischief who wilfully:

- destroys or damages property;
- renders property dangerous, useless, inoperative or ineffective; obstructs, interrupts or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property; or
- obstructs, interrupts or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property.

Penalty Section 430(4) states everyone who commits mischief in relation to property, other than property described in subsection (3):

- is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years; or
- is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction

## How Graffiti Affects Our Community

Graffiti is more than just words or symbols sprayed. Graffiti is an act of vandalism that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to remove or cover every year. Every dollar spent on graffiti removal is a dollar that could be used on other badly needed programs.

Areas filled with graffiti are less appealing to those who may be looking to buy or rent property. Property becomes more difficult to sell and values are reduced.

If not immediately removed, graffiti sends out a message that "nobody cares" about the area. It also causes the area to look unsafe and makes people concerned about their personal safety. This creates an open invitation for more littering, loitering and other graffiti. Unfortunately, it may also lead to an increase in other crimes and acts of violence.

**The Broken Window Theory** espouses that if a broken window in a building is left un-repaired the other windows will also be broken. An experiment to test this theory was performed by Wilson and Kelling (1982), whereby a car was abandoned in two neighbourhoods – one respectable and the other run down. In both of these neighbourhoods, the car was vandalized, showing that vandalism can occur anywhere once informal social controls are lowered by signals that no-one cares. The authors also suggest that untended behaviour can lead to breakdown of community controls (i.e. if a place is left untended, weeds will grow, windows may be smashed, young people will congregate, public drinking may occur, etc).

This breakdown may not lead to increased levels of crime, however, it will lead to increases in residents' perceptions of crime. The level of disorder will lead them to assume that crime, especially violent crime, is rising, making them feel less secure and more fearful. The suggested result of this is that people will avoid using the streets and have less contact with others, thus reducing community bonds, and installing individual's isolation. The resultant effect is that these environments also make a neighbourhood more vulnerable to crime. This shows how graffiti can contribute to the problems and perceptions of crime in a given community.

## **What the Public Can Do to Help**

Please report graffiti on Town property by phoning 780-842-3381, and depending on the location of the graffiti, you will be directed to the appropriate department manager.

Please report graffiti on residential/business property that is not owned or controlled by yourself by phoning the Community Peace Officer at 780-842-3381 or 780-842-7119.

The quick removal of graffiti is the most effective means to prevent further acts of vandalism so property owners should remove graffiti within 24 hours after it appears. This will prevent the offender from receiving the fame and recognition they desire when other taggers see their "Tag" and reduce the likelihood that it will spread.

Graffiti, like other forms of vandalism, is a crime. If you see anyone committing vandalism, **report it immediately by calling 911 (if it is in progress) or the Wainwright RCMP complaint line at 780-842-4461.**

Volunteer your time, donate supplies or help in any way you can eliminate graffiti in your community.

## **If You are the Victim of Graffiti**

**Immediately report all graffiti in progress by calling 911 or the Wainwright RCMP at 780-842-4461.**

If your property has graffiti you can contact Wainwright Municipal Enforcement at 780-842-3381. They will take a report and arrange for the graffiti to be photographed. This photo is kept on file for tracking and investigation purposes.

You could also take a photograph of the graffiti, then attend with the photo to the Town of Wainwright Office, 1018-2 Avenue (0830 hrs to 1630 hrs Monday to Friday) or provide the photograph to the attending officer when making a report.

## **How to Make Property Less of a Target**

Keep property clean and well maintained. Increase lighting around your property. Install motion detector lights where possible.

Establish a clear boundary between your property and public property (e.g. a durable fence).

On vulnerable walls, use clinging vegetation, like ivy, to eliminate large writing surfaces.

Plant thick or thorny bushes and install a durable fence to keep people out of or away from areas that could attract graffiti.

Request that pay phones, benches or other items be removed if they encourage people to loiter near your building during or after business hours.

Choose a durable surface or use protective anti-graffiti coatings for your building, as they are less of a target for graffiti vandals.

## **Graffiti Removal and Maintenance**

*The following information is to be used as a guide only:*

There are a number of effective graffiti removal products available, which are designed to work on a variety of wall surfaces. Before using any product to remove graffiti, consult with your local paint store or professional graffiti removal contractor. Always be careful and follow the manufacturer's directions when using any graffiti removal product. Some products may be toxic and will require that gloves and masks be used.

### **Painting over graffiti**

If a large portion of a property has been vandalized, it may be cheaper to simply repaint. It will also give you the opportunity to possibly change paints to a glossy enamel which will resist future graffiti attacks better than a flat finish. For added protection, an extra gallon of the same type of paint will help ensure a quick and painless perfect match if graffiti returns.

Before painting, try to clean the surface of any dirt or grease (dull surface with graffiti remover, primer or sanding). Certain marker pens and permanent markers have the ability to absorb paint pigments. That's what makes them permanent so use a special paint called a stain blocker. Also, if the base color is light and the graffiti a dark color, use a stain blocker first. This special type of paint prevents the darker paint from seeping through the fresh paint.

### **Oil or Latex paint?**

Oil base paint is tougher than latex. Latex is less expensive and easier to clean up. Though not recommended, oil base can be applied at below freezing temperatures if needed. Oil base takes longer to dry, but can be used if light rain threatens. Once the new paint is on, you might consider using a "sealer" or "protectant". These types of products seal the small surface pores and prevent graffiti's ability to adhere. Once sealed, the new graffiti is less work to remove.

### **Brick, cement and concrete**

Use extra strength paint remover. Apply with a wire brush to work into holes and pores of stone. Allow time to activate and rinse with a forceful stream of water from a hose. Use of a pressure washer or soda-blaster may be needed. If the surface is uniformly flat, a light grit (60) sand paper can remove paint, but will also scratch the surface. Consider using a sealer after removal to close pores and make future removal easier.

### **Stucco**

Due to the multi-faceted surface of stucco, it is impossible to sand off. Use paint remover and follow up with a high pressure water hose or pressure washer. Use stucco paint and go over the graffiti carefully. Consider using a sealer as a finish coat.

### **Aluminum/Vinyl siding**

Aluminum siding is usually coated or painted. Vinyl siding is made of plastic which can be marred by lacquer thinner type cleaners. Solvents may work to aggressively and remove the coating as well. Experiment in a small inconspicuous area first and then tackle the more visible areas. Use paint remover sparingly and carefully. Use a clean rag and keep turning to a clean part of the rag before each wipe. The longer the solvent stays on the surface, the deeper it penetrates. In most cases, you will probably have to repaint.

### **Wood**

Try working up the solvent list if the marks are new. Most thinners will remove magic markers and acetone will remove day old spray paint. You must use a clean rag and keep using a fresh part on each wipe. On latex or oil-

based paint, use a stain blocking primer for exterior use. After the stain blocker coat has dried, you can proceed with regular paints, oil or latex. Most oil based paints are more durable to solvents and hence could make future clean up easier. Consider a sealer coat after final finish. Avoid using flat paints as they readily absorb pigments from markers and spray paint.

## **Fiberglass**

Depending on the type of graffiti, work your way up the thinner list. Be aware that acetone-based solvents will soften plastics. Use full-strength paint remover and rinse carefully.

## **Glass or Plexi-glass**

Any razor blade can scrape away cured paint on regular glass. For other marks any solvent can be used. Use the clean rag technique and hold the rag over the graffiti for a moment to let solvent work. On plexi-glass be careful of the lacquer thinner type solvents as they can attack the surface causing it to fog and smear. Make sure your product is compatible with the type of surface you are cleaning. Rinse thoroughly with water.

## **Metal**

On any unpainted metal (iron or stainless steel) surface, any solvent can be used. Some polished aluminum surfaces will cloud or oxidize with aggressive cleaners like lacquer thinner. Use the clean rag technique. If you are unsuccessful, try paint remover.

## **Etching**

Surfaces scratched or scored with sharp objects can only be filled with fillers or the material will have to be replaced. Some new types of glass have replaceable covers or film layers that are cheaper to replace than the etched glass. Automotive body fillers can fill deep gouges and then be repainted. The only other recourse may be to replace the glass. You might deny the vandal visibility by etching over the vandal's mark, thus turning a "P" into a "B" and so on. It's a psychological solution, demonstrating that this area will not tolerate the vandal's message.

Please contact home and lumber stores or general contractors about graffiti removal and/or graffiti removal products.

## **More Info**

Community Peace Officer Riley Fowler can be contacted at 780-842-3381 or at [enforcement@wainwright.ca](mailto:enforcement@wainwright.ca).