

CLEANING UP GRAFFITI

It's easy to miss some of the smaller, yet important, changes that can happen in our community as we go about our busy lives. One such noticeable, yet often overlooked change, is the presence, or impact of, graffiti. Graffiti has been known to literally change the face of a community causing citizens to avoid certain areas that in turn attract criminals. Yet, very few people see it as a problem when it appears small and manageable.

This may help to explain why graffiti damage, estimated to exceed \$13 billion annually in the United States, has become a more acceptable part of the urban landscape.

Graffiti is a premeditated, and sometimes highly organized, form of vandalism with a very well-developed subculture behind it. It's often motivated by a desire for fame which accounts for the same "tag" (stylized signature or marker) or "masterpiece" being seen over and over again. The general public often attributes tagging to the work of gangs. While tagging can be gang-related, it's generally not the case. This makes little difference in the minds of the public, which simply chooses to avoid areas with excessive graffiti. This will ultimately affect profits and, if left unchecked, the viability of businesses and communities.

Graffiti must be dealt with before it has a chance to "breed". This means removing graffiti as soon as possible and thereby depriving the graffiti vandal of their most basic reward - fame. This may mean taking additional measures in highly visible and accessible locations that are particularly prized by graffiti artists.

The insidious nature of graffiti and the determination of these vandals make this a formidable and expensive form of criminal mischief that the community can't ignore. By reporting suspicious behaviour, we can stop graffiti before it happens. Here's how you can make a difference:

- C Report any graffiti on private or public property to the City of Mississauga's Enforcement Division at 905-896-5655, or visit the City's Web site at www.mississauga.ca/residents/forms
- C Report suspicious behaviour to Peel Regional Police at 905-453-3311.