

In the past graffiti vandals have been slapped on the wrist and very few have actually served jail time for their crimes. This is not the case now. The Pittsburgh Police have put together a Graffiti Task Force for the first time in its history. 3 full time officers dedicate 100% of their time to investigating graffiti crimes. The graffiti task force is responsible for making many graffiti arrests and possibly the largest graffiti prosecution in U.S. History.

We utilize a simple formula for graffiti cases. We use the cleanup cost charged by the Pittsburgh Public Works Graffiti Busters in calculating the total in our prosecutions. That formula is \$300.00 for the first square foot and \$50.00 for each additional square foot. These costs add up very quickly. A cleanup costing over \$5,000.00 becomes a felony and a physical arrest is made in the case. In the past these cleanup costs were rarely covered from the culprit and citizens of the City of Pittsburgh were made to foot the bill. We are trying to change this.

The D.A.'s office has agreed that graffiti cases will not be negotiated and all cases will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. The judges are also under pressure from the communities to handle the graffiti cases more firmly than in the past. For the first time all the components are in place to make a serious dent in graffiti related crimes.

### How to identify graffiti vandals

We are all working to educate parents, teachers, and concerned citizens on how to identify graffiti vandals and how to determine if their children or students may be taking part in graffiti crimes. Many of the offenders display similar characteristics. Most of them wear dark clothing and carry backpacks filled with spray cans. They wear ski masks (even in the summertime) and hand gloves. Much of their clothing will have paint splatters. You can also find paint on their finger nails and hands. Some of the offenders will spray paint items in their bedrooms. A quick peek at your child's/student's sketch books may have graffiti outlines and plans for tagging. They collect unusual items like different sizes of spray pint caps. The taggers tend to collect photos and videos of their handy work. If your children or students display any of these characteristics, you may want to address it as soon as possible. To recognize the characteristics after they are charged by the police may be too late. By then you may be responsible for tens of thousands of dollars in damage, if not more. You should also monitor your child's/student's computer activities. Many graffiti taggers have Myspace accounts in which they chat back and forth with each other about their escapades. If the prosecution involves investigating these activities, the home computer will likely be confiscated with a search warrant. Though we try not to, a forcible entry into your home is authorized by search warrants.

### Graffiti Taggers vs. Gang Taggers

Most of the graffiti that we investigate involve neighborhood taggers. They are typically non-violent and involve misguided youth with too much time on their hand. Gang taggers are a different story. Gang graffiti is usually an indicator that other types of crimes will be committed in the near future.

These tags are usually less prolific than our street taggers, but are more important in terms of relating to violent crimes. These tags contain many of the following characteristics: Crossed out letters. Upside down letters. All red or blue spray paint. The presence of block numbers in the graffiti. Example: 5400 block Spencer Street crips. The terms Crips and Bloods are usually noticed within the graffiti. You may also see the following terms in gang related graffiti: "Dog", "Loc" short for Loco, "Killer" or "Killa. "CK(Crip Killer) or B.K.(Blood Killer)", "Choppa", and violent, threatening words.

If you think graffiti written in your neighborhood may be gang related, than you should address it at your local community meeting and report it to the police ASAP. Again, it will usually be an indicator that more violent crimes may be on the horizon.

For any other questions or to provide confidential information to the police regarding graffiti, please contact the Pittsburgh Police Graffiti Task Force at 412-323-7818. To report graffiti at your home or business call 911.