

Fighting graffiti is a year-round battle

Crime + Criminal = Graffiti
City says quick cleanup, residents' vigilance in reporting incidences are our best weapons

By PROMISE YEE

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF WRITER

Graffiti scrawled on private and public property is often done by youths out of boredom or by a gang member to mark territory. The scribbled messages defacing telephone poles, utility boxes, and fences carry vandalism charges with penalties that range from probation, to fines, to community service hours, to jail time. Recent Watsonville Police records logged five graffiti vandalism misdemeanors for December with prosecution sought for each offense reported.

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Occurrences of graffiti fluctuate, but the problem has never completely gone away said Nancy Gray, senior administration analyst of the City of Watsonville Public Works and Utilities.

"Graffiti goes up and down over a time period," said Gray. "Sometimes it goes so low we think it's almost gone away."

Gray said rainy weather seems to curtail graffiti while summers, while children are out of school, commonly show an increase in graffiti.

"Two years ago several arrests were made and there was a big drop off," said Gray. "It goes up and down."

Watsonville Police Captain Kim Austin reiterated that incidents of graffiti go up and down.

"A new crew comes in and have to make a name for themselves, so to speak," said Austin. "It's usually

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juveniles doing the crimes."

Austin advises community members to immediately call 911 to report graffiti in progress; persons reporting do not need to leave their name. The anonymous tip line, 728-3544, can also be called to leave information. "The police can't be everywhere, all the time, we count on citizens to call us and report graffiti and vandalism," said Austin. "Descriptions of persons involved and license plates are really helpful."

The City of Watsonville Graffiti Abatement Program works to quickly clean up graffiti and provide preventative education. The Graffiti Removal Hotline responds within 24 hours to provide clean up services on reported graffiti.

"The faster we clean up the more of a deterrent we're putting out there," said Gray. "We ask community members to please call the hotline even if they do not wish to leave their name. We ask people to call whether or not the graffiti is on their property."

Public Works provides community beautification programs to local schools to teach students recycling, community clean up, and graffiti prevention said Gray. Public Works also sponsors neighborhood beautification projects.

One example is the mural project at Linscott Charter School in which elementary students painted murals



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Linscott Charter School students (left to right) Tyler Medoaz, Lauren Webb, and Sydney stand inside the school's playground in front of colorful murals.

along the fences behind the school. The mural beautification project was initiated last year to discourage defacing and littering on property adjacent to the school. Now students look out their classroom windows onto giant pastel flowers and walk by colorful jungle animals on their way home.

"The mural incorporates the alley as part of the school," said Linscott Principal Phil Fisher. "It has a great power to keep the playground attractive and clean."

Public Works hopes for similar success with projects planned for

other areas of Watsonville.

To contact the City of Watsonville Graffiti Removal Hotline call 763-7771, to report graffiti outside city limits call County Graffiti Removal Hotline at 722-7771.