

GRAFFITI MANAGEMENT FOR THE BLUE MOUNTAINS CITY COUNCIL

A summary of graffiti incidence in the Blue Mountains, resident attitudes to graffiti and a review of graffiti mgt plans and strategies in Australia

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This summary has been commissioned by the Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) to inform the development of the draft Blue Mountains Graffiti Management Plan (GMP). The paper has been prepared by an independent consultant, Michelle Black. The summary is based on information from the Blue Mountains Police, Blue Mountains Council community survey and graffiti data, interviews with key stakeholders, and a review of best practice graffiti management plans and strategies used by 30 Australian and overseas councils.

1. Review of Graffiti Management Plans

Graffiti Management Plan

- NSW government promotes an integrated, zero tolerance based model. This is outlined in the document titled *Graffiti Management Models* (http://www.graffiti.nsw.gov.au/Lawlink/cpd/ll_graffiti.nsf/vwFiles/Graffitimgmt.doc)
- Councils operating minimization based integrated models, combining zero tolerance and prevention strategies, are reporting best outcomes.

2. Incidence of Graffiti in the Blue Mountains

2.1 Community and Stakeholder Survey

- The common thread is a disdain for unsightly tagging and other graffiti [refer photo- tag in Katoomba. *Photographer: Natalie Toms*].
- Older residents are less tolerant of graffiti overall, and younger people more supportive of legal art and murals and youth focused strategies.
- Residents found that current initiatives for murals, freeway art etc work well to divert graffiti vandals, and others support environmental based strategies.
- Residents see an ideal plan as encompassing prevention of graffiti, volunteers, removal, tough penalties for graffiti and a vibrant mural and legal art program. This is congruent with council's vision for an integrated graffiti plan.



2.2 Incidence of Graffiti: Police and council data

- Majority of offenders are males, and most common offender age group is 18-24 years followed by 12-17 years.
- In the last five years there have been around 203 graffiti legal actions from Police.
- Peak periods for graffiti events are summer school holidays, and May. Number of events has stabilized in last two years.
- Suburbs with highest graffiti events (hotspots) are Blaxland, followed by Springwood and Winmalee. Katoomba is a hotspot area in the Upper Mountains.
- Crime Stoppers data show Blue Mtns now number 32 in NSW for recorded criminal incidents in outdoor places for malicious property damage.

- BMCC receives about 1,400 incident reports of graffiti a year. Most council property graffiti in Katoomba/Leura areas, while Blaxland and Lower Mtns attracts more private property graffiti.
- Average removal from council of around 73-120 attacks per month. The number of attacks has stabilized in last two years (after earlier increase).

2.3 Engagement

Community volunteers programs The Blue Mountains have several active volunteers for graffiti removal, with a more formalized program in Katoomba area.

- A few councils run volunteer programs. Incident reporting seems to work well, as does use of volunteers for regular environmental audits. OHS training and boundaries around sites for graffiti removal need to be clearly defined, with volunteers providing private and residential graffiti removal. Most councils require tight coordination of the program, and provision of paint and remover, and match these to existing colour schemes or supply paint vouchers.
- Councils and the government caution against using volunteers as a core strategy.

Murals and youth diversion programs The Blue Mountains has several vibrant mural projects at bus shelters, skate parks etc [refer photo of Lapstone mural]. A legal wall in Katoomba was disbanded, as it did not successfully divert graffiti.

- Other councils strongly support murals as environmental design measures, and many use local graffiti artists for mentoring mural designs. Some councils operate these with youth services, and have competitions for best bus shelter murals. Location and monitoring are important for successful implementation.
- Legal walls have not been so successful, and abandoned by many councils. Blue Mountains City Council established a legal wall with funds from the Attorney-General's Department through the Beat Graffiti Program. The wall was closed following withdrawal of support from both the Attorney General's Department and the Local Area Command.



Cash rewards Council does not use cash rewards for reporting graffiti offenders.

- Only one NSW council uses this strategy, and no-one has claimed the reward in 3 years of operation. Overseas the reward system is run in conjunction with court and police, to prevent exploitation of the system. The NSW Police suggest the crime stoppers program offers rewards for reporting criminals, including graffiti vandals and this could be promoted by councils.

3. Direction for Blue Mountains Council Graffiti Management Plan

3.1 Operation

- Council runs rapid graffiti removal through City Services, using a two man trailer.
- Graffiti is currently reported to council through the customer reporting system, and these incident reports are sent to the operations manager in Council.
- Council provides community graffiti removal information and contacts on their website <http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/sustainableliving/graffitimanagement>
- The Blue Mountain are spending in the vicinity of \$270K pa on removal, staff etc. This is consistent with other councils of similar population size.

3.2 Best Practice Operations

The following best practice operations are evident from other councils:

- Legal graffiti/mural policies operated as part of overall graffiti mgt, generally in cultural services or community development. Most councils successfully separate graffiti mgt. between engineering or parks units for removal, and cultural services/community development for corporate management, education and prevention programs.

- Most councils use no more than three evidence based strategies for each of the broad principles ie Eradication, Education, Engagement and Enforcement.
- Many councils have successful removal programs between external stakeholders such as Integral Energy, RTA, RailCorp, Telstra, Dept. of Housing, and Police using MOUs. These are used to establish protocols around the removal and funding for removal of graffiti on non-council property. In Qld, councils have formed a collaboration between councils and utility providers.
- Effective Graffiti Management Plans used by councils with tight reporting and coordination of graffiti removal, and more communication between relevant stakeholders – both internal and external.
- Some 23 out of 31 Sydney councils use the AUSGR reporting system. This channels customer services requests for graffiti removal into a database shared with police for easier identification of graffiti tags, and earlier apprehensions of offenders. Some councils allow residents to send through digital photo of local graffiti tags, location etc.
- Councils that have annual reviews and evaluation of outcomes assessed against key performance indicators including number of graffiti sites (based on audits), number of graffiti reports, costs of implementing graffiti mgt program, and so forth, are more likely to have a coordinated approach to graffiti mgt.

3.3 Education

Youth/School Based programs Council works with local community organizations in ad hoc education programs generally. Councils have reviewed the Warner Group program in schools intervention value in graffiti prevention.

- Several councils have purchased the Warner Group graffiti education program for Years 5 and 8 in schools. The program is expensive and generally regional councils cannot afford this. Alternative strategies involve working with schools to deliver a similar program. Police are also involved in delivering education programs in schools.

Community information and education strategy Council have information available through their website on graffiti and removal on www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au

- Other councils have found successfully integrating community information sessions within the community education strategy, send information leaflets on the Graffiti Management Plan to rate payers through notices, and provide clear links on the website.
- Several councils caution against using local media and publicity, as this has attracted more graffiti vandals.

4. Review of Graffiti Management Strategies

4.1 Eradication

Rapid removal Council currently operates a rapid removal policy for 24 hours removal for offensive graffiti, general graffiti in 72 hours and isolated in 5 working days.

- The majority of Australian councils have adopted similar practices, with no real difference in councils removing all graffiti within 24/48 hours, and those removing offensive graffiti rapidly, and general within 48 hours. Best practice allows for partnerships and MOUs with relevant utilities and private property owners in simultaneous rapid graffiti removal.
- Rapid removal should complement CPTED strategies, including graffiti resistant materials, camera surveillance and the like. Rapid removal works efficiently when environmental audits are conducted regularly between all stakeholders. This prevents taggers from removing their tags to alternative locations, in defiance of removal from more visible locations.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Council incorporates several CPTED measures in preventing malicious damage overall.

- Govt. evaluation supports CPTED measures as the best strategy to properly reduce graffiti.
- Best practice sets this as a core strategy, with regular environmental audits.
- Successful measures include planting over visible walls, graffiti resistant materials on buildings, mural sites, CCTV locations etc.

Private property removal/removal kits The Blue Mountains City Council does not remove from private property.

- No councils remove from private property overall. Some remove from visible areas on commercial property, and from street level only. At least one council applies a 3% rate levy to support removal.
- A popular strategy for councils is distribution of a capped number of kits per year for business and schools. This encourages business to take responsibility for removal on their own terms.
- Residential removal kits are distributed by councils in conjunction with OHS instructions, and include graffiti wipes, paint match or vouchers, and information leaflets.

4.2 Enforcement

Juvenile offender programs Council does not currently use juvenile offender programs, though there are some young people on Community service orders being supervised for graffiti removal in wider Penrith/Lower Mtns area and in Katoomba.

- Councils have reported success with this strategy, so long as supervision is undertaken through the Juvenile Justice Department. The feedback from other councils is that tight management as well as OHS issues need attention. The program provides a way of re-educating young *graffiti* vandals, rather than just a program for providing volunteer removal support from offenders – regardless of whether they were involved in graffiti vandalism or not.

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