



In general, graffiti vandals look for an easy target, such as smooth, light-colored walls and easy access. Rough textured walls, those which are painted dark colors, and those which are clean and freshly painted are less attractive to graffiti vandals. Vandals also tend to avoid walls with painted murals. In addition to making walls less attractive to vandals, property owners should make it more difficult for vandals to get close to walls at risk by using the following methods:

- Use clinging, climbing plants, such as ivy or climbing roses, on vulnerable walls. This will break up the writing space and make it harder for paint to reach the wall. If wall material would be damaged by the plants tendrils, use a screen structure suspended a short distance from the wall to support the plants.
- Plant short dense or thorny bushes in front of walls, avoiding areas near doors and windows. This makes it more difficult for people to get close to the wall
- Place fences between school and public property. This helps people know where the boundaries are, while also making it more difficult to access the building.

Another strategy in graffiti prevention is to make vandals more visible. This can be accomplished by using the following methods:

- Use motion-detector lighting in addition to regular lighting. If an area is usually dark, people are more likely to notice graffiti activities if it is suddenly lit up. This alone may discourage graffiti vandals.
- Remove large trees, bushes or other structures that block people's view of vandals. Stick with short bushes that keep people from getting too close to walls.

Cleaning Up a Graffiti Problem

While some graffiti vandals want to damage property, most seek the thrill of seeing their art or tags in places where other people can see them. By denying vandals this thrill, they will go elsewhere the next time. The most important thing schools can do is to clean graffiti up right away.

Several studies have shown that graffiti cleaned up within 24 to 48 hours results in a nearly zero rate of reoccurrence. If vandals do strike again, it is important to remain persistent. It may take cleaning up the graffiti several times before the vandals realize it's not worth their effort, but the effort on your part will be worth it in the end.

Graffiti cleanup can be accomplished in a variety of different ways. Which method for removal is best is determined by the amount of graffiti, its location and the vandalized surface. The method that is often quickest and most cost-effective is to simply paint over the graffiti. If using this method, don't just follow the outline of the tag. Instead, paint a complete area, blending the paint into the surrounding area to create the sense that there's never been a tag. Many graffiti abatement personnel use solvents or chemicals to remove graffiti. This works well on brick, stucco and other natural surfaces, but is difficult to use on painted surfaces as it will remove all the paint, not just the offending graffiti. Pressure washing the surface is also commonly used; however, care must be taken to not damage the wall surface. For those areas where graffiti continues to be a problem, exposed surfaces can be sprayed or painted using a commercial wax coating. When graffiti is applied, the property owner can simply hose it off, and the graffiti and wax wash away. Another application of the wax is necessary following each removal.

Finally, schools looking for a long-term solution can treat their exposed walls using a coating of epoxy-based paint. While expensive, costing as much as \$100 per gallon, it provides for very easy cleanup for as long as 10 years.

For additional information or questions, please contact one of the following:

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The Iowa School Safety Coalition was formed in December 2012. Participating organizations include Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Iowa State Fire Marshal, Iowa Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Emergency Management Association, Des Moines Police Department, Iowa State Education Association, Iowa Association of School Boards, School Administrators of Iowa, American Institute of Architects – Iowa Chapter, EMC Insurance Companies.