

Crime Prevention Tips

PREVENTING VANDALISM

Vandalism/Graffiti Prevention Look around your community. Do you see...

- Walls covered with graffiti?
- Knocked-over trashcans or mailboxes?
- Broken street lights?
- Spray paint on stop signs?
- Broken public telephones?
- Missing street and traffic signs?
- Writing or torn pages in library books?
- Public restrooms with broken doors and graffiti?

Vandalism Costs

Schools pay out millions of dollars each year to clean up graffiti, repair buildings, or replace vandalized equipment. That means less money for new books, computers, sports equipment, and student activities.

Local governments (and their taxpayers) pay the bills for broken street lights, stolen signs, and vandalized city parks.

Businesses pass the costs of vandalism on to customers through higher prices.

Vandalism Hurts

People feel angry, sad, and frightened when something of theirs -- a mailbox, a garden, a car antenna -- is destroyed for no reason.

Vandalism indirectly claims other victims -- a child is injured because a stop sign was stolen, a person can't reach 9-1-1 because the public phone is broken.

Who and Why?

Most vandals are young people -- from grade schoolers to teens to young adults -- who damage property for one or more of the following reasons:

- Boredom
- Anger
- Revenge
- Defiance
- Alliance



Mishawaka Police Department

200 N. Church St.
Mishawaka, IN 46544

Phone: 574-258-1678
Fax: 574-258-1690
www.MishawakaCity.com

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Graffiti is often the first sign that gangs are taking over a neighborhood. Gangs use graffiti as their street "telegraph," sending messages about turf and advertising their exploits. Graffiti identifies territorial boundaries, lists members, and communicates with rival gangs. The gang says "This place belongs to us."

A community's first step in taking back its streets from gangs is getting rid of graffiti immediately. This power struggle can't be won overnight, but persistent communities working in partnership with law enforcement almost always emerge as victors. Once the graffiti is gone, use landscape designs (such as prickly shrubs or closely planted hedges), building materials (such as hard-to-mark surfaces), lighting, or fences to discourage vandalism.

You Can Help Prevent Vandalism

- Educate the public, especially young people, about the costs of vandalism.
- Clean up vandalism as soon as it happens -- replace signs, repair playground equipment, paint over graffiti.
- If you see anyone committing vandalism, report it to the police, school authorities, or someone who can take action.
- Remember, vandalism is a crime.
- Protect your house or apartment from vandalism by using good lighting and locking gates and garages.
- Support recreational programs for young people in your community. Volunteer your time, donate money or supplies, and help in any way you can.

Take a Stand!

- Tap into the energy and idealism of youth. Involve young people in all vandalism prevention efforts.
- Organize a graffiti clean-up project in your neighborhood.
- Work with Neighborhood Watch and ask the city or a local business for cleaning supplies and paint.
- Work with schools or the arts community to paint murals on areas that are vulnerable to graffiti. Make it a contest for teens.
- Adopt a street or park, perhaps in cooperation with a church or business. Plant trees, bushes, and flowers. Repair equipment and install trash containers. Organize a monthly park patrol to clean up litter and keep an eye on things.
- Ask police or a city agency to start a hotline for reporting vandalism.
- Have a community meeting on vandalism to discuss its victims, costs, and solutions.
- Make certain that city or town officials promptly remove abandoned cars.

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