GRAFFITI RESOURCE COUNCIL

FIGHTING GRAFFITI IN YOUR COMMUNITY

How the Graffiti Resource Council Can Help
A number of American communities are plagued by graffiti vandalism, much of it carried out with aerosol paint, commonly referred to as spray paint. The Graffiti Resource Council (GRC) is an important ally for these communities, focused on supporting and strengthening local anti-graffiti initiatives across the country.

“Just how?” you may be wondering. Well, the GRC provides information, education, and legislative assistance to help communities develop effective policies and programs that prevent and combat graffiti vandalism. Formerly known as the National Council to Prevent Delinquency (NCPD), the council has provided public policy resources and advocacy at the state and local level for over 20 years to support comprehensive anti-graffiti programs that do not restrict the supply of aerosol coatings to legitimate consumers. Funded by the aerosol coatings industry, which is concerned about the negative impact of graffiti vandalism on America’s communities, the GRC is a nonprofit corporation whose primary goal is to prevent graffiti vandalism and provide creative solutions that promote graffiti-free communities.

As much as ever, today the council is focused on the prevention and elimination of graffiti vandalism. To accomplish this objective, the council will conduct research, gather and evaluate information; develop comprehensive strategies, policies, and programs; and provide implementation assistance designed to eliminate graffiti vandalism and promote positive, innovative anti-graffiti strategies for communities.

This document aims to introduce you to the GRC and what it can do for your community.

GRC in Action

The GRC helps communities, free of charge, by providing model regulations to clearly define and criminalize graffiti vandalism along with appropriate penalties and abatement strategies. The model regulation that serves as the basis of the mission is the International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA) Model Anti-Graffiti Ordinance. Based upon the anti-graffiti ordinances in Los Angeles County and San Diego, Calif., Boston, Mass., DuPage County, Ill., Rochester, Minn., and several other cities across the country, it provides all the elements for a comprehensive anti-graffiti regulation. When communities seek to develop an anti-graffiti ordinance, the GRC can also provide information about the regulations and policies that have been adopted in neighboring cities and towns. In addition, the GRC can help communities develop focused volunteer efforts to clean up graffiti vandalism and enforcement initiatives to aggressively identify and prosecute vandals.

For example, when the city of East Oakland, Calif., committed to a massive campaign to clean up graffiti vandalism, the GRC assisted the local beautification council by reaching out to the municipal paint collection program and asking for recycled paint to cover graffiti vandalism. “Operation Clean Sweep“ was successful, due in part to the council’s effort to develop resources for East Oakland’s program.

When the city of Carlisle, Penn. sought to take on its graffiti problem proactively, the GRC crafted a broad anti-graffiti approach. Working collaboratively, the GRC created an arsenal for Carlisle that hinged on point-of-sale prevention, including signage, employee training, and prudent display and line-of-sight standards. Additionally, the GRC created educational outreach materials for Carlisle to be prominently displayed in high schools, and also encouraged the city to develop a policy for sale of aerosol coatings to minors.

Centralized Resources

Recognizing that the task of taking on graffiti vandalism may seem overwhelming or even impossible, the GRC wants to help. As such, the council, through its website, www.anti-graffiti.org, offers a plethora of information and direction for city mayors, city managers, downtown beautification organizations, members of the city council, procurement officers, transportation officials, graffiti task force members and many others, to help prevent and tackle graffiti vandalism. In the online GRC “Marketplace,” visitors can search for a range of products and services that will assist in clean-up and prevention activities. This includes anti-graffiti coatings, clean-up equipment, and surveillance and capture technologies.1

Moreover, for your community-specific concerns, GRC can connect you with experts and consultants who can provide technical and program assistance. For instance, if you have specific questions about how to clean-up graffiti vandalism on a specific substrate or perhaps a historic landmark, GRC’s Restoration and Substrate Experts can provide you with technical information for removing graffiti from difficult or sensitive substrates. The GRC hosts this information that is often used by cities, counties and municipalities across the country to fight back against graffiti vandalism, and does so to help you learn more and make informed procurement decisions.

Information Gathering & Sharing

One of the goals of the GRC is to highlight the anti-graffiti success stories taking place every day in communities around the country. Toward that end, the council collects such information, making it available to the public so that it may inspire or lead to other victories in the community fight against graffiti vandalism. The GRC shares these innovative strategies on its website in a dedicated area so that other communities and governments may benefit from them.

The GRC identifies cities and states throughout the country that have introduced graffiti-related legislation or communities that want to create anti-graffiti programs. The council has worked with cities as large as San Diego, Calif., Baltimore, Md., and Miami, Fla., to smaller communities like Hatboro, Penn. and Ansonia, Conn. Where advocacy opportunities exist, the GRC encourages state and local government officials to adopt responsible retailing requirements rather than customer registration, lock-up, licensing and other requirements that restrict shelf space for aerosol coatings or restrict legitimate customer access.

What Doesn’t Work

As states and municipalities cope with the cost and irritation of cleaning up after graffiti vandals, they often seek new powers to help them solve the problem. In some cases, such legislative initiatives take the form of “supply-side” controls, the most extreme of which is the City of Chicago’s 1992-enacted ban on the sale of spray paint to private citizens. However, the most common “supply-side” approach involves the restriction of the display and sale of aerosol coatings or a “lockup” ordinance.

Yet, while “lockup” ordinances have never been shown to reduce graffiti vandalism, they are very successful at discouraging legitimate sales of spray paint and related items. Under “lockup,” retailers are required to keep spray paint displays in locked cases or cages otherwise inaccessible to customers without employee assistance.

The principal flaw in applying supply-side controls to the graffiti problem is that they attempt to change a criminal behavior by regulating a legitimate consumer product. Also, because graffiti vandals have numerous alternative sources of paint and other tools, supply-side controls simply cannot control supply.

Workable Regulatory Framework

Instead, the GRC offers an effective, workable regulatory framework that clearly defines and criminalizes graffiti vandalism, includes effective penalties for violators, protocols for graffiti removal, and appropriate outreach to retailers and consumers. As mentioned, IMLA’s Model Anti-Graffiti Ordinance is the cornerstone of the GRC’s regulatory framework. The comprehensive statute defines graffiti and graffiti crimes, imposes penalties, offers prevention provisions geared to sale and display of aerosol coatings, and also provides abatement strategies.

And many municipalities have customized the GRC and IMLA model to work for them. For instance, Kansas City, Mo. has adopted the model regulation relying heavily on the GRC’s responsible retailing elements; and the state of Texas passed a law based on the GRC-IMLA model, customizing it to add the option for a computerized checkout system at the point of sale that alerts the cashier that customers purchasing aerosol paint must be over 18 years of age.

A graffiti-free community is not a utopian dream; it is possible, but takes hard work that requires community commitment to the goal of prevention and elimination. With the cooperation of law enforcement officials, the juvenile court system, transportation agencies, streets and sanitation agencies and the support of your local elected officials, the GRC can get you there.

Learn More

To learn more about the GRC, please visit www.anti-graffiti.org or contact GRC’s Executive Director Heidi McAuliffe (hmcauliffe@paint.org) or Advocacy Counsel Javaneh Nekoomaram (jnekoomaram@paint.org) at (202) 482-6272.