



## Royal Newfoundland Constabulary *Graffiti Resource*

### “So I’ve been Tagged”- A Resource guide for Homeowners and Business’s

When someone has graffiti put on their property many questions come to mind, however the most frequent one that comes up is **Why me?**

This Resource guide was compiled to help answer that question and provide useful information to a Homeowner or Business that has been victimized by those that participate in this criminal behavior.

#### Definition of Graffiti:

Generally, graffiti can be defined as **the defacing of public or private property by painting, drawing, writing, etching or carving without the property owner’s permission.**

The offence of Mischief found in the Criminal Code of Canada gives police the power to lay charges for graffiti related incidents.

**Section 430(1) ccc states everyone commits mischief who willfully:**

- a. **destroys or damages property;**
- b. **renders property dangerous, useless, inoperative or ineffective;**
- c. **obstructs, interrupts or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property; or**
- d. **obstructs, interrupts or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property.**

**Penalty Section 430(4) states everyone who commits mischief in relation to property, other than property described in subsection (3):**

- a. is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years; or**
- b. is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.**

## **History**

The word *Graffiti* comes from the archaeological term for Graffito which is defined as *ancient drawing or writing scratched on a wall or other surface*. Graffiti has gone through many changes throughout history, from the caveman's drawings on the walls, to markings on ancient Greek pottery. Graffiti has evolved from occasional writing on the bathroom walls and back alleys to a group of persons who seek to gain notoriety and recognition by marking buildings and any object that presents a canvas for their markings.

A New York courier using the tag *TAKI 183* is credited as the starter for modern Graffiti when he used the subway to access all five boroughs of New York in the 1970's. This explosion of tagging coincided with the arrival of Hip Hop music in the late 1970's and 1980's. To this day Hip Hop and Graffiti remain joined at the hip with each other.

## **DIFFERENT TYPES OF GRAFFITI**

"HipHop" and "Tags" are the most common form of graffiti found within Newfoundland jurisdiction.

- **Hip Hop or Wild Style:** Sophisticated, often pre-planned cartooned murals, which incorporate a tag. Lettering is commonly done in bubble or three-dimensional form. Uses many different colors. Wild style often employs the use of arrows.
- **Tag or Signature:** Currently the most common graffiti in Newfoundland. Falling under "Hip-Hop", this is the individual assumed name of a graffiti writer, a "Tagger". The Tagger will then practice their tag and develop unique style to their written tag. The tag will be written on an object with a marker tool. Goal is fame within the graffiti culture. Taggers join crews for companionship and protection.
- **Gang:** Gang graffiti, although not yet evident in the Newfoundland, is used to establish recognition, create intimidation and mark their turf or area. Gang graffiti is commonly written when a new gang is formed. When gang graffiti stops, it usually means that the gang no longer exists or that it has evolved into more high profile activity and does not want to draw attention to itself through graffiti anymore.

## **What is a “Tag”?**

A Graffiti Tag is basically a signature, an individual identifier adopted by writers which the tagger will be known by in the graffiti culture. They develop an individual style to differentiate their tag.

## **WHY ARE TAGS UNIQUE?**

Choosing a tag is not taken lightly. This tag will be with you for your life in the graffiti culture. The need for fame, recognition, respect and all the other things diminishes if someone else gets the credit.

## **WHAT IS A “TAGGER”?**

A tagger is simply an individual who vandalizes property with graffiti without permission. For many, tagging is a sport and to others it becomes a way of life. At its roots, modern graffiti is still about words and writing words on surfaces with various substances. Not all taggers are artists or painters and that is why most accomplished taggers call themselves *Writers*.

## **WHAT IS A TAGGING “CREW”?**

A tagging crew is a group of active taggers with their own distinct name, usually consisting of 2-4 words which is then reduced to an acronym. *Some known to St Johns are “Stylin’ your Streets” (SYS), Audio Video Club/ Amateur Vandalism Crew (AVC) etc* . A crew will have anywhere from 2 to 12 members but on rare occasions can be just one person.

Each crew will have a leader who usually starts the crew in the first place. Tagging crews are another form of street gangs

## **WHY DO THEY TAG?**

Fame within the graffiti sub-culture, a means of expressing their opinions, attitudes, emotions and doing this outside the norm, generally comprising of 4 main elements:

- a. Recognition:
  - Low self esteem.
  - Peer recognition.
  - For recognition, a distorted view of fame.
  - See graffiti in the community and want to try it.
  
- b. Anti-Authority:
  - A way to rebel against authority
  - To get out their aggression

- c. Artistic Ability:
  - Some are very talented artistically and this is their way to express themselves and develop and practice their ability.
  - Some think they are artistic.
  
- d. Addition:
  - Becomes obsessive-compulsive. They are addicted to *Getting Up* which is tagging throughout the community, as well as to paints, markers and tagging.

### **WHAT IS GRAFFITI PARAPHERNALIA/TOOLS**

- Felt and paint markers.
- Spray paint, Krylon is the paint of choice.
- Paint sticks.
- Wax marking stick.
- White Out.
- Glass Chalk.
- Shoe polish.
- Bingo Blotter.
- Lipstick
- Etching Tools.
- Painters mask.
- Rubber gloves



## **THE BROKEN WINDOW THEORY**

The *Broken Window Theory* espouses that if a broken window in a building is left un-repaired the other windows will also be broken. An experiment to test this theory was performed by Wilson and Kelling (1982), whereby a car was abandoned in two neighborhoods – one respectable and the other run down. In both of these neighborhoods, the car was vandalized, showing that vandalism can occur anywhere once informal social controls are lowered by signals that no-one cares. The authors also suggest that untended behavior can lead to breakdown of community controls (i.e. if a place is left untended, weeds will grow, windows may be smashed, young people will congregate, public drinking may occur, etc).

This breakdown may not lead to increased levels of crime, however, it will lead to increases in resident's perceptions of crime. The level of disorder will lead them to assume that crime, especially violent crime is rising, making them feel less secure and more fearful. The suggested result of this is that people will avoid using the streets and have less contact with others, thus reducing community bonds, and installing individual's isolation. The resultant effect is that these environments also make a neighborhood more vulnerable to crime.

## **DEFINITIONS OF COMMON GRAFFITI TERMS**

**All City:** A tag that is found throughout the entire city.

**Back Up:** A secondary tag used if the primary tag is known by police.

**Battle:** A contest between two rival taggers or tagging crews to see who can tag the most in a given time or similar rules.

**Bite:** To adopt a similar style, tag or crew name of another tagger or crew.

**Bleeder:** A type of paint that when painted over bleeds through, defeating the paint over.

**Beef:** Disagreement or conflict between individual taggers or crews.

**Bombing:** the act of going out to cover a large area with graffiti tags.

**Bombing Runs:** When a group of taggers get together and do a tagging spree.

**Buff:** To remove graffiti by painting over.

**Buffer:** City employee who removes graffiti.

**Burner:** A well done mural which is designed to stand out and not as detailed as a piece.

**Cap:** Spray paint can tips or nozzles. *Fat caps* spray a wide line, *Testers* spray a thin line.

**Crew:** A group of taggers with their own distinct name, usually consisting of three words, Amateur Vandalism Crew (AVC). Crews are usually identified by their initials only. Many crew names show an acceptance for violence and destructiveness. Other know St John's Crews: AVC, SYS, AGK, ACG

**Cross Out:** Crossing out another's tag. Meant as an insult or challenge.

**Dis:** To disrespect someone by writing over or on another tagger's work.

**Etch:** To put a tag up using etching acid instead of paint.

**Fat Cap:** Spray can tips that have a wide line.

**Fill-In:** A throw-up using two colours, one for the outline and one for the centre also called two colour throws or throw-downs.

**Free Wall:** A designated area where pieces or graffiti murals can be legally painted.

**Heavens:** Any high object to tag on, such as rooftop, large overhead freeway sign or billboard.

**Hip Hop:** A sub-culture that emerged in New York City in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Hip Hop is associated with rap music, break dancing, baggy clothes and graffiti.

**Jack:** To steal a tagger's supplies, usually by robbery.

**King(s):** Superior male tagger or tagging crew.

**Mob:** Putting as much graffiti on an object as possible and done in groups.

**Paint Stick:** A type of marker pen filled with paint.

**Piece:** Short for masterpiece. A mural, an elaborate large scale painting of one's tag utilizing different colours of spray paint. The piece can also be a caricature or statement.

**Piece Book:** A sketch book used by taggers to practice their own unique style of graffiti writing. These books often contain sketches of throw ups or pieces that they have done in the past, or are planning to do in the future.

**Racking:** Stealing, to shoplift spray paint cans, aerosol can nozzles, etching acid, liquid shoe polish applicators or markers.

**Scribe:** An object used to etch or scratch graffiti on glass, metal or plastic. Covering a large area with etched tags is called scratch bombing.

**Slap Tags or Stickers:** Pre-tagged stickers. Taggers write their tag on stickers, then put up in difficult areas and slapped on objects when walking by, reduces risk of being caught. Can be used in daylight.

**Tag:** the most basic form of graffiti, a graffiti writer's signature. A moniker or nickname usually consisting of three to seven letters. The basic tag is printed or scrawled, and can be either easy or difficult to read. An individual's tag can be the product of a whim or long deliberation. Some tags are meant to project the personality of the tagger while others are meant to shock or offend by the use of hateful or offensive words.

**Tagger:** a person who adopts a unique nickname/moniker (tag), and then paints, writes, or etches that tag on private and public property.

**Tagging:** The act of writing graffiti tags.

**Throw-up:** Larger than the basic tag, in bubble or balloon style letters, using one colour and appears as an outline.

**Toy:** A beginner or a tagger who writes in an amateurish manner. A term of disrespect.

**Wild Style:** A unique style of tagging that exhibits overlapping letters and can include arrows at the end of the lines.

**Writer:** Description preferred by taggers.

## **GRAFFITI REMOVAL AND MAINTENANCE**

*The following information is to be used as a guide only:*

There are a number of effective graffiti removal products available, which are designed to work on a variety of wall surfaces. Before using any product to remove graffiti, consult with your local paint store or professional graffiti removal contractor. Always be careful and follow the manufacturer's directions when using any graffiti removal product. Some products may be toxic and will require gloves and masks be used.

### ***Painting over graffiti:***

If a large portion of a property has been vandalized, it may be cheaper to simply repaint. It will also give you the opportunity to possibly change paints to glossy enamel which will resist future graffiti attacks better than a flat finish. For added protection, an extra gallon of the same type of paint will help ensure a quick and painless perfect match if graffiti returns.

Before painting, try to clean the surface of any dirt or grease (dull surface with graffiti remover, primer or sanding). Certain marker pens and permanent markers have the ability to absorb paint pigments. That's what makes them permanent so use a special paint called a stain blocker. Also, if the base colour is light and the graffiti a dark colour, use a stain blocker first. This special type of paint prevents the darker paint from seeping through the fresh paint.

### ***Oil or Latex paint?***

Oil base paint is tougher than latex. Latex is less expensive and easier to clean up. Though not recommended, oil base can be applied at below freezing temperatures if needed. Oil base takes longer to dry, but can be used if light rain threatens. Once the new paint is on, you might consider using a "sealer" or "protector". These types of products seal the small surface pores and prevent graffiti's ability to adhere. Once sealed, the new graffiti is less work to remove.

### ***Brick, cement and concrete:***

Use extra strength paint remover. Apply with a wire brush to work into holes and pores of stone. Allow time to activate and rinse with a forceful stream of water from a hose. Use or a pressure washer or soda-blaster may be needed. If the surface is uniformly flat, a light grit (60) sand paper can remove paint, but will also scratch the surface. Consider using a sealer after removal to close pores and make future removal easier.

### ***Stucco:***

Due to the multi-faceted surface of stucco, it is impossible to sand off. Use paint remover and follow up with a high pressure water hose or better yet a pressure

washer. Use stucco paint and go over the graffiti carefully. Consider using a sealer as a finish coat.

### ***Aluminum/Vinyl siding:***

Aluminum siding is usually coated or painted. Vinyl siding is made of plastic which can be marred by lacquer thinner type cleaners. Solvents may work to aggressively and remove the coating as well. Experiment in a small inconspicuous area first and then tackle the more visible areas. Use paint remover sparingly and carefully. Use a clean rag and keeping turning to a clean part of the rag before each wipe. The longer the solvent stays on the surface, the deeper it penetrates. In most cases, you will probably have to repaint.

### ***Wood:***

Try working up the solvent list if the marks are new. Most thinners will remove magic markers and acetone will remove day old spray paint. You must use a clean rag and keep using a fresh part on each wipe. On latex or oil-based paint, use a stain blocking primer for exterior use. After the stain blocker coat has dried, you can proceed with regular paints, oil or latex. Most oil baser paints are more durable to solvents and hence could make future clean up easier. Consider a sealer coat after final finish. Avoid using flat paints as they readily absorb pigments from markers and spray paint.

### ***Fiberglass:***

Depending on the type of graffiti, work your way up the thinner list. Be aware that acetone-based solvents will soften plastics. Use full-strength paint remover and rinse carefully.

### ***Glass or Plexiglass:***

Any razor blade can scrape away cured paint on regular glass. For other marks any solvent can be used. Use the clean rag technique and hold the rag over the graffiti for a moment to let solvent work. On Plexiglas be careful of the lacquer thinner type solvents as they can attack the surface causing it to fog and smear. Make sure your product is compatible with the type of surface you are cleaning. Rinse thoroughly with water.

### ***Metal:***

On any unpainted metal (iron or stainless steel) surface, any solvent can be used. Some polished aluminum surfaces will cloud or oxidize with aggressive cleaners like lacquer thinner. Use the clean rag technique. If you are unsuccessful, try paint remover.

### ***Etching:***

Surfaces scratched or scored with sharp objects can only be filled with fillers or the material will have to be replaced. Some new types of glass have replaceable covers or film layers that are cheaper to replace than the etched glass. Automotive body fillers can fill deep gouges and then be repainted. The only other recourse may be to replace the glass. You might deny the vandal visibility by etching over the vandal's mark, thus turning a "P" into a "B" and so on. It's a psychological solution, demonstrating that this area will not tolerate the vandal's message.

***Please contact home and lumber stores or general contractors about graffiti removal and/or graffiti removal products.***

If you have any information pertaining to graffiti or wish to report that your property has sustained graffiti related damage please contact the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary or RCMP. With your assistance we may be able to identify taggers and crews, or possibly associate identified suspects to your complaint. Our goal is not to see young persons charged under the criminal code. Our efforts are focused on finding a long term solution to a problem which requires the assistance and input from all community stakeholders.

**This guide was prepared by Constable Joe Smyth of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. If you have any questions or concerns regarding graffiti he may be reached at either 729-8000 and e-mail [graffitinetwork@gov.nl.ca](mailto:graffitinetwork@gov.nl.ca). If you wish to provide information anonymously, you can also contact the Newfoundland Crimestoppers Office at 1-800-222-TIPS.**

#### Contributors:

Cst Lee Jones, Saskatoon Police Service  
Det Rod Hardin-Seattle Police Department  
Cst Wendy Hawthorne-Translink  
Cst Darrall Kotchon-Winnipeg Police Service  
Ofc Don Almer-Bellingham Police Department  
Det Lee Barnard-Oxnard Police Department