



Perris Press Release

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Tagger Tracking, Targeting, and Restitution Reduces Graffiti

A combined effort that includes high-tech graffiti tracking and monitoring, specialized police officers targeting vandals and a City commitment to prosecuting “taggers” has resulted in a 40 percent decrease in the number of tagging incidents in the last three years.

The continuing efforts has resulted in the arrests of 22 vandals—including some repeat offenders—and restitution demands totaling \$445,000.

The reduction has allowed Perris to reduce from two to one the number of Public Works employees removing graffiti full-time. That in turn has allowed the City to shift badly needed resources to other areas of concern, like patching potholes, maintaining municipal parks, weed abatement, repairing broken street lights and similar activities.

Perris Public Works Manager Daryl Hartwill told the City Council that the number of incidents of graffiti tagging fell from 6,611 between January and May 2010 to 3,962 during the same period this year.

“This is really good news,” Hartwill said. “Graffiti used to be prevalent from one end of the City to the other. Now you don’t see it. The City looks good. Residents are taking pride in the way Perris looks.”

Hartwill said Perris residents are calling in to report graffiti and sending emails to Perris officials, another example of how the war against graffiti is sparking community pride.

City officials hailed the news but promised Perris will keep up its relentless efforts to minimize graffiti and punish those responsible.

Hartwill said that three years ago, Perris installed the web-based “graffiti tracker system,” which uses state-of-the-art cameras, global-positioning satellites and computer software to pinpoint precisely the times and locations of individual graffiti “tags.”

Those incidences are entered into a data base, which assists law enforcement in compiling a case against graffiti vandals, who usually leave their same “tag” whenever they vandalize a wall, flood channel, traffic sign or fence.

Perris Police officers Gabriel Gil and Ruben Martinez make up the second prong of the City’s war against graffiti. The pair, members of the department’s Special Enforcement Team, take the information provide by graffiti tracker to local schools, parks and shopping centers where teen-agers congregate and talk to them, developing intelligence about possible taggers. School administrators and parents also help identify potential taggers.

Gil and Martinez said they arrested 22 juveniles and adults between November and April. They face fines, probation, community service and incarceration in county jail or state prison. Law officers said one repeat offender faces two years in state prison.

The parents of other offenders are making monthly installments to pay for their childrens’ vandalism--restitution that cost hundreds of dollars each month.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch thanked City staff for their “diligent work” in removing graffiti within 24 hours and for working with police to reduce the amount of tagging in Perris.

“Working together, the City and police have made great strides to reduce this kind of vandalism,” Busch said. “I feel really good about what we have done to curtail this activity and to punish the criminals responsible for it.”

Perris City Councilman Al Landers said he has sympathy for parents forced to pay for their youngsters crimes. “But I would rather see parents pay than taxpayers,” Landers said.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans said she is “really glad that we are winning the war on graffiti.”

“But we can’t let up,” she said. “I think the new program we have in place is making a world of difference.”

Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers said she is particularly pleased with the reduction in graffiti because it was the top concern of Perris residents in a survey conducted a few years ago. She said she is heartened because the reduction shows the City Council is committed to addressing and solving critical issues.

“This is a real quality-of-life issue that matters to Perris residents,” Rogers said. “I am pleased that we have made such a difference and I am committed to seeing the City maintain its vigilance against graffiti.”

City Councilman Mark Yarbrough said that most communities would be happy, in these times of police layoffs and patrol budget cuts, to hold their own against graffiti. But Perris continues “winning the battle,” he said.

“We are not just holding our own, we are moving forward,” Yarbrough said.