



## Perris News

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### Perris Cracks Down on Graffiti and Illegal Food Vendors

The City of Perris and Perris Police are stepping up efforts to track down and put out of business graffiti taggers and illegal food vendors.

Perris police and Public Works officials already have identified 25 prolific taggers, arrested several and are seeking more than \$2 million in restitution from the vandals and their parents.

While Perris officials know they will not collect full compensation, Public Works Manager Daryl Hartwill said the City expects to receive a portion from every convicted vandal.

The City has experienced an uptick in graffiti tagging and illegal street and sidewalk vendors. Several possible reasons exist.

The economy makes it tough for some legitimate food-related businesses to pay license fees and taxes, creating a void that cash-only unlicensed vendors may be filling. Warm weather inevitably brings out more food carts peddling popsicles, ice cream, corn-on-the-cob and barbecue.

City staff and elected officials agree that illegal vendors and graffiti cost the Perris scarce financial resources and pose health risks to residents. Hartwill said Perris spends \$260,000 annually just to remove graffiti, money that could otherwise pay for additional parks and recreation services or public works projects.

Perris Public Works administrators are working with City Police to identify major taggers. The City also employs a system known as "Graffiti Tracker," a high-tech which uses camera, motion detectors and computers to photograph and identify would-be taggers. Once they are identified, police work with teachers to obtain the names of the vandals' parents and address and then pay them a call. Vandals can be cited, arrested and in some cases transported to Juvenile Hall.

Using the combined police/graffiti tracker approach, Perris officials have identified 25 major taggers since Jan. 1. In one case, a single tagger was linked to more than 1,500 tags. The City is seeking \$500,000 from that teen-ager's family. Another tagger is responsible for 429 cases of vandalism.

Perris Police officers Jason Gore and Ruben Martinez, members of the Special Enforcement Team, say most taggers are juvenile boys between 11 and 17 years of age. They come from all ethnic backgrounds. When caught, many taggers say they mark up signs, drainage ditches and walls to show their artistic creativity.

"They believe it is art," Gore said. "They do it to express themselves. Some eventually grow out of it. Others are arrested for other crimes."

Removing that art is time consuming and expensive. Painting over a single 5-foot by 5-foot tag costs \$330, by the time labor and material costs are included.

"The City is taking a pretty hard stand against graffiti, without a doubt," Gore said.

Perris police also will be working with Code Enforcement Officers to combat illegal food vendors. Code Enforcement Officers Joe Kircher, Shane Hidey and Cindy Sesma say vendors operating from push carts to industrial-size grills operate along major thoroughfares like Harley Knox Boulevard, Orange Avenue, Indian Avenue, Perris Boulevard and throughout Downtown. Some set up in parks, some alongside roadways, some at playing fields hosting soccer tournaments and other athletic competitions.

Illegal vendors have no health cards, business licenses or proper kitchen equipment to warm and serve food. They can pose a serious health risk. Perris municipal ordinances give Code Enforcement officials authority to confiscate carts, grills, propane tanks and other equipment. Violators face fines of \$100 to \$500. Confiscated equipment is stored at the City's Public Works Yard.

Perris elected officials strongly endorse the twin crackdowns but say costs related to bringing illegal vendors and graffiti under control would be better spent elsewhere.

"It's like taking money and throwing it down the drain," said City Councilman Mark Yarbrough. "But you've got to stay on top of graffiti or it multiplies so we take it down immediately. As for vendors, any such business has to be safe and sanitary. I am not trying to restrict peoples' freedom of expression and I don't want to restrict business but it's got to be done within the law or else we will have chaos."

Yarbrough said he would like the Perris Citizens Patrol and Neighborhood Watch Groups report unauthorized vendors and taggers.

City Councilman Al Landers said graffiti "takes the City down instead of lifting it up." Illegal vendors profit at the expense of those who pay license fees, taxes and comply with health and municipal codes.

"It's not fair to legitimate vendors and it could create serious health problems," Landers said. "You don't know what you're buying."

Mayor Daryl Busch said the City "vigorously supports" the twin offensives against graffiti and vendors. Both problems affect the quality of life in Perris.

"We are committed to doing the right things for our residents," Busch said.



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