

GRAFFITI AND ITS REMOVAL, WITH A FOCUS ON OFFENSIVE GRAFFITI

Introduction

Graffiti can in some cases be viewed as a form of art, which can range from street art which adds vibrancy to urban spaces to vandalism which defaces public or private property. While some graffiti can be appreciated as artistic expressions, other forms, especially offensive graffiti, can pose significant challenges. Offensive graffiti can include hate speech, racial slurs, profanities, or graphic images which can incite violence, offend, or intimidate members of the community. The removal of such graffiti should be a priority for maintaining public order and community harmony. This report explores various methods for graffiti removal, focusing particularly on strategies for dealing with offensive graffiti.

The Nature of Graffiti

Graffiti can be categorised into the following types:

- Artistic or Street Art: Created by skilled artists, often with a social or political message.
- Tagging: Simple, stylised signatures or marks by graffiti writers, usually indicating territorial boundaries or gang affiliations.
- Offensive or Hate Graffiti: Contains hate speech, discriminatory language, or offensive images. This type is the most concerning as it can create in some circumstances a hostile environment.

Impacts of Offensive Graffiti

Offensive graffiti can have multiple negative impacts on communities, including:

- Psychological Impact: It can create fear, distress, or feelings of exclusion, especially for targeted groups.
- Economic Impact: Can affect property values, business environments and, in the case of the public realm, creates a financial burden on the taxpayer.
- Social Impact: It can exacerbate social tensions and lead to community discord.

Graffiti Removal

The approach to removing graffiti, particularly offensive graffiti, involves several steps and methods:

a) Immediate Response and Reporting

The quicker the offensive graffiti is removed, the less likely it is to have a lasting impact on the community. Rapid removal also discourages further graffiti as it denies the offender the visibility they seek.

b) Removal Methods

Different methods are effective depending on the surface and the type of graffiti. The common removal techniques include:

Chemical Remover: Graffiti removers, such as solvents and cleaners, are effective on hard surfaces like brick, metal, or concrete. However, care must be taken to use environmentally friendly products to avoid harming the surface or surrounding areas.

Power Washing: High-pressure washing with water or sandblasting can be effective on surfaces like brick or concrete. This method can be aggressive and might damage softer surfaces, requiring careful consideration of the material involved.

Painting Over: For large graffiti on painted surfaces, painting over it with a matching colour can be effective. However, this method should be done carefully to avoid creating a “clean slate” that invites more graffiti.

Sanding Off: This removal method is more suitable for removing graffiti from wooden structures.

Graffiti-Resistant Coatings: Applying anti-graffiti coatings on frequently targeted areas can make future removal easier. These coatings prevent paint from adhering well, allowing graffiti to be washed off more easily with water or mild detergents.

c) Specialised Removal for Offensive Graffiti

Offensive graffiti requires special handling due to its content:

Use of Non-Abrasive Methods: For areas where offensive graffiti is located in sensitive areas, non-abrasive methods that minimize damage to the surface are preferred.

Disguised Removal: In some situations where immediate removal is not possible, covering offensive graffiti with a temporary material can minimise its exposure to the public.

d) Long-Term Prevention Strategies

Community Engagement and Education: Promoting awareness of the negative impact of graffiti, especially offensive types, can deter potential offenders. Engaging the communities in beautification projects and mural paintings can also offer creative alternatives.

Enhanced Lighting and Surveillance: Well-lit areas with CCTV cameras can serve as a deterrent to graffiti offenders. Posting signage indicating surveillance can further discourage illegal activities.

Legal Measures and Enforcement: Establishing fines, penalties, or community service for graffiti offenders, along with robust enforcement, can act as a deterrent. In the case of offensive graffiti, a zero-tolerance policy should be enforced.

Conclusion

Dealing with graffiti, particularly offensive graffiti, requires a multi-faceted approach that balances rapid response, effective removal, community engagement, and long-term prevention. Offensive graffiti, due to its potential to harm communities and individuals, must be prioritised for removal.

Recommendation(s)

- a) To implement rapid reporting and removal protocols: Establish clear reporting systems and dedicated response teams to ensure the swift removal of offensive graffiti.
- b) To use appropriate removal techniques: Choose removal methods that suit the surface type and nature of graffiti to prevent damage and ensure effectiveness.
- c) to consider Anti-Graffiti Coatings: If appropriate apply graffiti-resistant coatings in high-risk areas to facilitate easier clean-up.
- d) To engage Communities in Prevention: Foster community pride and ownership through public engagement and education campaigns.
- e) To adopt the Graffiti Arrangements in the appendix.
- f) To adopt the graffiti risk assessment No. 18 “Graffiti Removal”

Graffiti Removal Arrangements

Introduction

Removing graffiti, especially when it involves chemical cleaners or working in public spaces, requires strict adherence to safety procedures to protect staff and the public from potential hazards. These hazards can range from chemical exposure and physical injuries to environmental and situational dangers. Below is a comprehensive outline of safety procedures for staff to follow during graffiti removal:

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Staff should be equipped with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to minimize exposure to hazards:

Gloves: Use chemical-resistant gloves (e.g., nitrile or neoprene) to protect hands from corrosive or irritant chemicals found in graffiti removal solvents.

Safety Goggles or Face Shields: To protect eyes from splashes of chemicals, solvents, or high-pressure water.

Respiratory Protection: When using chemicals that emit harmful fumes or vapours, staff should wear appropriate respirators (e.g., N95 or half-face respirators with organic vapour cartridges).

Protective Clothing: Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and chemical-resistant aprons or coveralls to protect skin from chemical exposure.

Foot Protection: Sturdy, closed-toe shoes or boots with non-slip soles should be worn to protect against chemical spills and provide stability on potentially slippery surfaces.

Hazard Assessment and Risk Management

Before beginning graffiti removal, a thorough hazard assessment (Method Statement) should be conducted:

Site Evaluation: Inspect the site for potential hazards, including uneven surfaces, broken glass, syringes, or other dangerous materials that may be hidden in graffiti-covered areas.

Identify Hazardous Materials: Determine if the graffiti removal area involves exposure to potentially hazardous substances such as lead-based paint, asbestos, or other toxic chemicals. Be aware that wooden structures have probably been chemically treated therefore PPE will be required when sanding off Graffiti.

Control: If the graffiti is located in high-traffic or public areas, establish control measures such as safety cones, barriers, or caution tape to protect workers and pedestrians.

Safe Handling of Chemicals

Proper handling and usage of chemicals are crucial for the safety of the staff:

Read Safety Data Sheets (SDS): Staff must familiarise themselves with the SDS for each chemical being used, to understand the potential hazards, first aid measures, and safe handling procedures.

Ventilation: Where necessary ensure adequate ventilation in enclosed or partially enclosed areas to avoid the build-up of harmful fumes or vapours.

Proper Dilution: Follow manufacturer guidelines on the dilution of chemicals to prevent the release of concentrated fumes and potential chemical burns.

Storage: Store chemicals in properly labelled containers and in accordance with Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations/manufacturers recommendations. If the chemical is deemed to be flammable it should be stored in a suitable locked cabinet outside of the building.

Disposal of Waste: Dispose of chemical waste should be disposed of in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions.

Equipment Safety

Graffiti removal often involves the use of equipment such as power washers, sandblasters, or ladders. Safety precautions must be observed:

Training: Staff should be adequately trained where necessary in the use of equipment such as power washers or sandblasters to prevent misuse and accidents.

Inspect Equipment: Before use, inspect all equipment for damage or wear. Faulty equipment should be repaired or replaced immediately before use.

Power Washing and Sandblasting Safety(if required): Ensure power washers and sandblasters are operated at safe pressure levels and away from people, as high-pressure streams can cause serious injuries.

Working at Height: If the use of a ladder is required, the cleaning task must be performed by two members of staff.

Situational Awareness and Environmental Safety

While removing graffiti, staff must remain vigilant to the surroundings and potential threats:

Lone Working: Whenever possible, staff should work in pairs to ensure safety in case of an emergency. Working alone is not recommended, particularly in secluded or potentially dangerous areas.

Be Aware of Public Interaction: Graffiti removal staff may encounter confrontational individuals, staff should be trained to de-escalate situations and, if necessary, retreat and call for assistance.

Emergency Procedures: Staff should be familiar with emergency procedures, including how to summon medical help, report incidents, and evacuate the area in case of chemical spills, equipment failure, or other emergencies.

Training and Continuous Improvement

Ongoing training and monitoring are key to maintaining safety during graffiti removal:

Regular Safety Training: When necessary staff should undergo regular safety training on PPE usage, chemical handling, equipment operation, and emergency procedures.

Incident Reporting and Review: Implement a system for reporting near misses, accidents, and injuries to analyse incidents and update safety protocols as needed.

Stay Updated on Regulations: Safety procedures and environmental regulations regarding graffiti removal can change. Staff should stay informed of any updates or changes in guidelines to ensure compliance and safety.

Conclusion

Graffiti removal, especially when involving offensive or challenging locations, presents several risks to staff that require comprehensive safety protocols. By equipping staff with the proper PPE, training, and equipment, and by establishing robust hazard assessment and emergency response procedures, can ensure the safe and efficient removal of graffiti while minimising risks to staff and the public.