

**COMMUNITY POLICING COMMITTEE**

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR  
AND COUNCILLORS*

**SUBJECT: ACID-BASED GRAFFITI**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. THAT Council authorize staff to prepare a resolution for submission to the Lower Mainland Local Government Association and the Union of BC Municipalities requesting the Province to develop regulations requiring retailers to control access to products used in graffiti vandalism.

**REPORT**

The Community Policing Committee, at its meeting held on 2014 December 11, received and adopted the attached report providing information on measures to reduce access to acid-based etching products used in graffiti vandalism.

Prior to adopting the report, the Committee AMENDED the recommendation to include submission of the resolution to the Lower Mainland Local Government Association.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor P. Calendino  
Chair

Councillor P. McDonell  
Vice Chair

Copied to:	City Manager Deputy City Managers Director Engineering Director Planning and Building OIC RCMP
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Councillor A. Kang  
Member

**TO:** CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
COMMUNITY POLICING COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 2014 December 02

**FROM:** DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING

**FILE:** 2410 20

**SUBJECT:** ACID-BASED GRAFFITI

**PURPOSE:** To provide information on measures to reduce access to acid-based etching products used in graffiti vandalism.

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. **THAT** staff be authorized to prepare a resolution for the Union of BC Municipalities requesting the Province to develop regulations requiring retailers to control access to products used in graffiti vandalism.

**REPORT****1.0 BACKGROUND**

At the Community Policing Committee meeting on 2014 March 13, the District #2 citizen representative inquired about the possibility of regulating acid-based etching products as an anti-graffiti measure in Burnaby. In response to the inquiry, the Committee passed the following motion:

*“THAT staff review the feasibility and advisability of regulating the placement of acid-based etching products in paint and arts and craft stores in Burnaby.”*

This report provides information on existing initiatives to combat this type of graffiti vandalism and highlights additional measures to address the issue.

**2.0 BURNABY’S ANTI-GRAFFITI STRATEGY**

In 2006 March, the Mayor’s Task Force on Graffiti was established to develop an approach to combatting graffiti in the city. In 2007 January, Council approved an anti-graffiti strategy developed by the Task Force based on four inter-related and intersecting elements: graffiti eradication; public education on graffiti; graffiti prevention; and identification and deterrence of graffiti vandals.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Mayor’s Task Force on Graffiti received a progress report on the City’s anti-graffiti program at its meeting on 2013 December. The City’s Anti-Graffiti Coordinator and the Burnaby RCMP’s Anti-Graffiti Officer presented highlights of the report to the Community Policing Committee at its 2014 January 9 meeting.

Under the strategy's graffiti prevention element, the strategy contains the following action: *"Work with local retailers of paint, spray paint, acid, felt pens, and other graffiti tools on product placement within their premises in order to limit the unauthorized access of graffiti vandals to such media."*

Since the adoption of the strategy, the City's Anti-Graffiti Coordinator has worked closely with retailers of the products noted above to apprise them that most of the products used in creating graffiti are stolen and seek their voluntary agreement to display such products in a way which reduces opportunities for theft. This initiative has helped to reduce the amount of graffiti appearing in the community and has reduced losses for retailers as well.

### **3.0 RESPONSE TO ACID-BASED TAGGING**

In late December 2013 and early 2014, the city experienced a rash of acid-based tagging. Acid-based tagging is done with acid-based etching products typically sold by arts and craft stores and similar types of retailers to create art on glasswork. Graffiti vandals acquire these products, often by theft, to tag glass surfaces in the community.<sup>2</sup> Acid-based tags are difficult to remove and often result in property owners having to replace glass panels targeted by this type of tagging.

In response to the acid-based tagging incidents, staff reviewed the availability of acid-based etching products in Burnaby and identified one retailer as a main supplier of these types of products. The City's Anti-Graffiti Coordinator visited the retailer and found that these materials were on open display in the store. The Anti-Graffiti Coordinator advised the store manager of the risk of theft and the resulting damage that could occur in the community, and the store manager subsequently agreed to keep these materials under lock and key. Police advise that although the acid-based tagging had been done by a select group of graffiti vandals, and it was unknown how they acquired the product, the number of reported acid-based tags has decreased.

### **4.0 ADDITIONAL MEASURES**

In the context of the acid-based tagging incidents, staff have considered other measures to combat this type of graffiti vandalism, as discussed below.

#### **4.1 Regulation by Bylaw**

Staff have reviewed bylaws in other jurisdictions that restrict the sale of materials used for graffiti to minors and/or require retailers of these products to keep them under lock and key. From this review, it was determined that these bylaws have had limited success. In addition to the challenge and resources required to enforce such bylaws, they are considered of limited value unless applied on a region-wide basis. That said, even if applied regionally, taggers can acquire these materials through the internet, although the purchase cost from this source can be a deterrent. Research on graffiti also indicates that taggers can range in age from their early teens to early 30s, therefore banning the sale of these materials to minors would be of limited effect.

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<sup>2</sup> A tag is generally a three to seven letter personal identifier adopted by a graffiti vandal and placed on another person's or organization's property.

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While recognizing other sources of supply (e.g., the internet), staff believe there is merit in seeking Provincially coordinated regulations that would require retailers to control access to products used in graffiti vandalism. Similar to other potentially harmful materials (e.g. pesticides), Provincial regulations would result in more effective access control provisions that would be applied uniformly across B.C. municipalities. To that end, it is proposed that staff be authorized to prepare a resolution for the Union of B.C. Municipalities (UBCM) requesting the Province to develop such regulations. If so authorized, staff would prepare the resolution for submission to the 2015 UBCM conference. The resolution would be presented to Council for approval in a report to be prepared in advance of the UBCM resolutions deadline.

## **4.2 Awareness and Coordination**

Over the past year, the City's Anti-Graffiti program has benefited from a more integrated approach between the City and RCMP. Together the City's Anti-Graffiti Coordinator and the Burnaby RCMP's Anti-Graffiti officer continue to monitor graffiti incidents and apply the City's four-pronged approach (eradication, public education, graffiti prevention, and identification and deterrence of graffiti vandals) to combat graffiti.

To address acid-based tagging, the Anti-Graffiti Coordinator will continue to visit individual retailers of products used in this type of graffiti vandalism. Outreach to retailers will include raising awareness of the damage acid-based products can cause when used by graffiti vandals, advising retailers of their risk of theft, and seeking their support in restricting access to these products. In addition to in-person visits, this information will also be conveyed through print materials distributed more broadly in the community. Education and outreach efforts will include regional managers of larger retail stores in Burnaby.

To promote greater awareness and coordination of anti-graffiti measures, the City's Anti-Graffiti Coordinator and the RCMP Anti-Graffiti Officer also established a Burnaby Graffiti Action Team in 2014 April comprised of representatives from BC Hydro, Telus, Burnaby malls, Community Police Advisory Committees, Crime Stoppers, Burnaby RCMP Crime Prevention, TransLink, Transit Police, CP Police, CN Police, School District 41, and the City's Engineering and Parks Departments. The purpose of the committee is to discuss current graffiti issues, develop solutions and examine ways to work more collaboratively. City and RCMP Anti-Graffiti will convene the Burnaby Graffiti Action Team on an ongoing basis and will invite local retailers to participate.

Since graffiti vandalism is not contained by municipal borders, City and RCMP Anti-Graffiti staff also intend to convene regular meetings of representatives of Lower Mainland municipalities to exchange information on known graffiti vandals, develop common strategies to address graffiti, and create consistent communication messages targeted to graffiti vandals (e.g. criminal code and bylaw implications) and businesses/property owners (e.g. graffiti prevention techniques). Through the regional committee, staff will seek the support of corporate head offices in regulating access to products used by graffiti vandals. A regional anti-graffiti committee comprised of staff from municipalities across the Lower Mainland will complement the work of the existing Lower Mainland police-based graffiti task force.

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Any further initiatives or proposals that arise from the Burnaby Graffiti Action Team or regional anti-graffiti committee will be brought forward to Council for its consideration.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Graffiti, including acid-based tagging, is a common problem in communities across the Lower Mainland. Its negative impacts are well known to property owners and the community at large.

The City, together with Burnaby RCMP, will continue to implement its four-pronged anti-graffiti strategy to combat graffiti (eradication, public education, graffiti prevention, and identification and deterrence of graffiti vandals). This approach includes working closely with city and region-wide stakeholders, including retailers, to reduce access to materials used by graffiti vandals.

To achieve a broader reaching, coordinated response to this region-wide problem, it is recommended that staff be authorized to prepare a resolution for the Union of BC Municipalities requesting the Province to develop regulations that would require retailers to control access to products used in graffiti vandalism.

Lou Pelletier, Director  
PLANNING AND BUILDING

MM:sa

Copied to: City Manager  
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