

Graffiti Hurts™ Update – Santa Clara Crime Stoppers

In Santa Clara County, CA, a Crime Stoppers program that targets graffiti vandalism was launched in June, 2004. Silicon Valley Crime Stoppers, a volunteer organization, is targeting youth and adults with their slogan, "Graffiti--It's a Crime."

"We're trying to make people understand that graffiti is a crime, and that you can be arrested," says Ken Kelly, President of the Board of Directors for Crime Stoppers Silicon Valley. Posters, brochures, fliers, and television and newspaper PSAs are being developed to let residents know how to anonymously report graffiti vandalism in action.

The tip goes on a voice mail directly to a police officer, so the caller remains anonymous. The tip is then assigned a confidential code number. If an arrest is made as a result, the tipster is eligible for a cash award. In Santa Clara County, it's up to \$1,000.

"We hope this gets them paying attention and watching their neighborhood," says Kelly. "You never know what a minor tip will lead to." San Jose Beautiful is delighted with the program. "Our role is minimal, but we're really glad they're doing it and we'll support them in any way we can," says Rick Stanton, Anti-Graffiti and Litter Program Supervisor for the City of San Jose whose program collaborates with San Jose Beautiful.

The graffiti Crime Stoppers program in Portland, OR, has been in operation for six years, and continues to have success. Earlier this year, a reward was given to a homeless man living in a van, whose "home" was tagged while he was in it. He watched and got enough information to describe the vandal, and call 9-1-1. The police arrived in time to make an arrest, resulting in the identification of an additional 4 prolific taggers.

The crime stoppers poster (pictured) is posted throughout the city-on community billboards, at businesses, on school campuses, and other public locations. "I think anything you can do to educate the public on why graffiti is harmful to the community and raise awareness of anti-graffiti efforts is helpful," says Marcia L. Dennis, Graffiti Abatement Coordinator for the City.

Crime Stoppers allows citizens to take an active role in helping prevent graffiti, even if they can't participate in abatement efforts. "It's another aspect of community policing that is so important," says Dennis. "Crime Stoppers raises awareness of the criminal nature of graffiti, and rewards people who take the time to be involved through information sharing."

To learn more about Crime Stoppers, which is volunteer-operated in coordination with the local police, visit the Crime Stoppers International web site at www.c-s-i.org. There are over 1,000 Crime Stoppers programs in the U.S., Canada, and countries throughout the world. These programs target a variety of crimes and boast a conviction rate of 95% on cases solved by Crime Stoppers' tips.