

City of Half Moon Bay Graffiti Abatement Program Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why do people do graffiti?

A: Many people who vandalize with graffiti are seeking fame or recognition; some just want to destroy property. Others mark “their territory” to let people know who’s living in the neighborhood.

Q: How can I keep my building from becoming a graffiti target?

- Installing video cameras will help to discourage, identify and prosecute graffiti vandals.
- Installing motion detector lights will discourage vandals from tagging while they are under lighted areas.
- Installing landscaping ivy or painting murals that cover blank walls will remove an attractive “canvas”.
- Installing thorny landscaping, hedges and trespassing barriers can provide discouragement.
- Applying protective coatings will ease graffiti removal; however coatings will not repel graffiti.
- Moving objects (such as dumpsters, ladders vehicles, etc.) away from buildings will keep graffiti vandals from climbing onto rooftops and into other secure areas.

Q: What should I do if I see someone tagging?

A: Call 9-1-1 if the graffiti tagging is in progress. Be prepared to give a head-to-toe description of the vandals, their location, and their direction of travel. If you see graffiti vandalism, after the fact, call the [Graffiti Abatement Hotline at \(650\) 712-7310](tel:6507127310).

Q: Who is responsible for removing graffiti from my property?

A: *Property owners* are responsible for removing graffiti from their property. The City of Half Moon Bay has an ordinance that requires property owners to remove any and all graffiti from their property.

Q: Who is responsible for removing graffiti from public property?

A: The City of Half Moon Bay is responsible for removing graffiti from city owned public places such as building walls, light poles, signs, city facilities, city utility boxes, and other public property.

Q: If I remove the graffiti what are the chances of being graffiti tagged again?

A: Graffiti vandals understand that their message is part of the graffiti process. If they constantly see their graffiti removed in a short period of time, they will eventually get frustrated and quit or move to another area that is more lax in removal efforts. Allowing graffiti to remain in an area tends to encourage more graffiti. Quickly removing graffiti from an area tends to discourage this activity.

Q: How do I report graffiti to the Graffiti Abatement Program Hotline?

A: For both public and private property, call the Graffiti Abatement Hotline at (650) 712-7310 or email graffiti@co.sanmateo.ca.us Please provide the exact street address and the location where the incidence occurred. Include the nearest cross street, a description of the object tagged (building wall, fence, sign, building, etc.) Include the business name and the original color of the object *before* it was vandalized. Also, be sure to leave your name and daytime phone number so that you can be contacted if there are any follow-up questions.

Q: What if I know someone who’s been tagging?

A: You can report graffiti vandals anonymously to the [Sheriff’s Office at \(650\) 726-8288](tel:6507268288).

Q: Does graffiti mean there are gangs in my neighborhood?

A: Not necessarily. Gangs do use graffiti as a means to communicate. However, the largest percentage of graffiti includes random vandalism and graffiti “tagging”. “Taggers” will sometimes work individually or form “crews” who put their tags or monikers on as many places as possible. Sometimes taggers will even digitally video their vandalism and share it on social media.

Community Involvement

The City of Half Moon Bay is committed to empowering our residents to achieve independence from the blight of graffiti by encouraging graffiti removal throughout our community.

To coordinate a volunteer graffiti removal activity in Half Moon Bay, please contact [the City of Half Moon Bay at \(650\)726-8270](#). Volunteer groups will be provided the following:

- Locations of the high priority graffiti removal locations
- Information on safe and clean removal via the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) regulations.

The Sheriff's Office has also made a commitment to provide presentations and training to all types of individuals, community groups and organizations. Anti-Graffiti training meetings will focus on enhancing graffiti awareness and consequences for graffiti vandals; why vandals create graffiti, the social impact of graffiti how to graffiti proof your property, how to identify gang related graffiti, and how to determine if someone may be a graffiti tagger. To coordinate a presentation, call the [Sheriff's Community Policing Unit at 650-363-4537](#).

Enforcement

Half Moon Bay Municipal Code, Section 15.26.030 B. makes it unlawful for a parcel or lot owner to allow graffiti to remain upon any structure on that parcel or lot. **Section 15.26.050** requires the owner or occupant of a parcel or lot to remove the graffiti within fifteen (15) days after notification. Removal must be by cleaning, painting or other method. Please report the vandalism and take photos of the damage before cleaning.

If the graffiti is not removed from the property within fifteen (15) days of the date of notice, then the graffiti will be removed by the City. All costs associated with the removal will be charged to the property owner per **Half Moon Bay Municipal Code, Section 15.26.090**.

Sheriff's Office Enforcement

Vandalism costs are huge in this country and the graffiti culture is commonly associated with other anti-social and criminal behavior. When graffiti vandals are caught, the Sheriff's Office works with the District Attorney's Office and Probation to ensure that they are held accountable for their actions. This can include:

- Mandatory fines and victim restitution.
- Loss or suspension of driver's license for up to a year.
- House arrest with ankle monitor. (Offenders are required to pay for the monitoring service)
- Juvenile Hall commitment. Jail commitment. Prison commitment in severe cases.
- A third conviction for graffiti vandalism is an automatic felony count, depending on if a vandal has spent at least one day in jail as a result of the previous charges. Damage in excess of \$400 can be a felony charge.

Best Practices for Graffiti Removal Around Gutters and Storm Drains

The disposal of removed graffiti materials must be in compliance with environmental regulations. It is the homeowner and/or volunteers responsibility to choose and purchase the most appropriate solvent or material to use in the graffiti removal process. To avoid any unanticipated cost, delays, and violations, it is recommended that the environmental regulations be considered prior to starting a graffiti removal project. All disposal methods are subject to requirements, restrictions, and prohibitions and are outlined below.

Planning

- Prior to beginning any graffiti cleaning activities determine what cleaning method you will be using and how you intend to properly dispose of any chemicals and/or wastewater generated from each cleaning activity.
- Obtain all necessary permits and authorizations.
- Identify the specific location where you will be disposing of the chemicals and/or wastewater.
- Obtain the properties owner's permission before disposing of waste water or chemicals on his/hers property or the sanitary sewer cleanout.

Disposal

- All wastewater discharge into the sanitary sewer must meet the requirements of the Sewer Authority Mid Coast Side.
- Wastewater disposal to land must not create nuisance condition, flow into the storm drain, reach the shallow aquifer, or contaminate soil with hazardous-waste (I.E. oils, grease, paints, paint removers...)
- Discharging wastewater, into any natural body water or any storm water system, such as storm drains, ditches, and gutters, within San Mateo County is prohibited by federal, state, and local laws.
- Exceptions to this prohibition must be approved in writing by the local storm water jurisdiction and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Evaporation

- Washing or pressure washing wastewater, that contains visible debris or residue, soap, detergent or other cleaning agents, hazardous-waste or excesses amounts of any pollutant, may not be left on paved surfaces to evaporate, because the residue will eventually be discharged into the storm drain.

Recommendation for Waste Collection

- Identify where all the area storm drains are situated.
- Locate property high and low spots, and determine the area where waste and wastewater can be pooled for collection. Drainage swales may sometimes be used to collect water before it enters a storm drain.
- Common equipment used for containing and collecting wastewater generated during washing and pressure washing activities include: vacuum pumps/berms, portable containment areas, weighted storm drain covers, inflatable plumbers plugs, oil water separators, holding tanks, portable sump pumps, hoses, and assortments.
- Avoid mixing non-hazardous wastewater with wastewater known to contain hazardous levels of pollutants. This may increase the volume of waste and require complicated treatment and/or disposal as a hazardous-waste thus increasing disposal cost.
- Place an oil absorbent mat/pad on top of collected wastewater to help reduce the amount of oil that is redeposited on the surface of the collection area.
- Wastewater can be filtered through an oil absorbent boom or water separator and a filter to decrease the concentration of oil and liquid. This will also decrease the amount of solids in the wastewater.
- Once wastewater has been collected and/or discharged to the sanitary sewer system visible solids remaining in the collection area must be swept or vacuumed up to prevent sequential discharged to the storm drain.

For questions on how to keep material out of the storm drain system or the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) please contact the City's public works department at 650-726-8260.