WHAT IS GRAFFITI ABOUT?

Is Graffiti Illegal?
Graffiti is a form of vandalism and is illegal when it defaces property, whether public or private. California Penal Code 594.

Does Graffiti Mean Gang Involvement?
Not necessarily. There are two types of graffiti. Each is distinctive from the other. Gang Graffiti; Tagging Graffiti

1. Gang Graffiti is used to designate gang territory, gang affiliation, gang members and often times tells what is going on with the gang

2. Tagging Graffiti is used for gaining "Fame" with others who are into tagging. The tagging usually shows the "Tag Name" or moniker and sometimes the name of the Tagging Crew they belong to.

Why do Youth Tag?
Youth who engage in tagging are often looking for respect among peers, excitement, and a sense of belonging and to appear "cool". The youth form Tag Crews. Tag Crews can range from 1 to 100 members. The Crew's sole purpose is to gain notoriety through putting the Tag Crew's name in as many public places as possible. The more dangerous the location of the tag the more notoriety or "Fame" gained. The individual members of the Tag Crew have their own Tag Name or moniker, which they also try and put on as many walls as possible. Some youth will even belong to numerous Tag Crews at one time.

Are Tagging Crews Gangs?
Not in the traditional sense of Gangs who terrorize neighborhoods and individuals. Tagging crews generally are not violent. However, in cities throughout California, tagging crews have begun getting involved in turf wars with shootings and fighting. Gangs are traditionally formed along racial lines whereas with Tagging Crews, racial and socio-economic status is not important. What is important is how good of a graffiti artist one is. The better one is or the more "fame" one has, the more other Crews desire them.

What is the Cost of Graffiti?
The cost of graffiti varies depending on where the graffiti is done and how large it is. Painting cannot always clean up graffiti over it. Depending on the surface that was damaged, the graffiti might have to be cleaned off with special equipment. Often times when the graffiti is painted over or cleaned there is a reminder of the damage left behind (i.e. the paint did not quite match the original paint or maybe the spot is now darker than the rest). Many local businesses, small and large, independently owned and chain stores alike are targeted, causing hundreds if not thousands of dollars in clean-up costs. Graffiti is a form of vandalism that destroys.
Is Paint always used to Write Graffiti?

Laws have been enacted in order to prevent youth under the age of 18 years from purchasing spray paint. Spray paint is the traditional tool of graffiti artist. Today’s youth have been known to use paint, shoe polish rolls, etching tools, rocks, pens almost any instrument that can leave a distinctive mark on a surface. "Slap Tag" is another method of graffiti. This form entails writing out the Tag Crew’s name or the individual’s tag name on a sticker. The sticker is then slapped onto poles, walls, newspaper bins or any surface. The tagger will often times carry on their person sheets of stickers ready for slapping onto any surface.

Who Pays for the Graffiti?

If the youth is under 18 years, the ultimate cost becomes the parent’s responsibility. Judges have been known to attach the wages of individual’s in order to pay for the damage. If the youth is over 18 years old, then they are responsible for the damage. If no perpetrator is arrested then the responsibility falls on the taxpayer, business owner, homeowner or individual victim.

What can a parent do if they think their child is involved in tagging?

It is difficult for a parent to report their child to the police for numerous reasons, fear of cost in damages or even not wanting their child arrested. However, if the parent does not aggressively stop the tagging, the tagger will continue to sneak out and tag, increasing the cost and increasing the chance of being caught. The Berkeley Police Department is committed to working with the parent to stop the youth from tagging. Often times, first time offenders are eligible for Diversion. Parents may also contact the owner of the damaged property and offer to resolve the matter privately. Also, be advised that gang graffiti is often the sign of gang involvement. Many youth will express their interest with gangs through graffiti way before they ever actually join a gang. Once again early detection and prompt action is imperative in order to stop the youth from joining a gang. For more information you can call the Youth Services Division (510) 981-5715.