

# Convicted vandals can face jail term of up to two years

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deface property with graffiti to realize the far-reaching impact they're having.

"If they damage private property, the (Town) bylaw says that private individual has to clean the graffiti up. It's costing that person money," he said. "And when it's on public property, the Town has to clean it up — that comes out of their parents' tax base. It's the residents that all lose in the long run."

The Town budgeted \$30,000 for graffiti cleanup in 2008, and council also approved a graffiti policy earlier this year. The rules say staff will remove any hateful, racist and obscene graffiti on Town-owned property within 24 hours of being reported, while graffiti on high-profile areas and assets will

be removed within 72 hours of notification.

In cases where there's hateful, racist graffiti, the Town won't be cleaning it up until Halton Regional Police have been advised and investigated. In all other graffiti cases, staff will report and photograph the incident and send it to the police for their database.

Town Director of Engineering Services Paul Cripps said the municipality greatly appreciates it when residents let them know about graffiti that's on Town property.

"Graffiti is an important issue that we have to address," he said.

Drinkwater said while there's been some incidents of hate graffiti and other types of offensive markings, such as those of a sexual nature, he said the majority of graffiti is

'tags,' or a distinguishable signature for an individual or group.

He also said that while some graffiti may be gang-influenced, Milton doesn't have a gang problem. There may be closely-knit groups of friends who are defacing property with graffiti, but they're not gangs.

In addition to reacting to the graffiti that surfaces around town, police are also taking proactive steps to deal with the problem, such as through education in schools and visible patrolling.

Drinkwater said there are consequences for those who choose to vandalize property with graffiti, including up to two years in jail for a serious offence. "Graffiti is a criminal offence, and if you're convicted it could

affect you for the rest of your life."

Earlier this year, the Milton Community Policing Committee (MCPC) held a meeting to discuss the local graffiti situation. Committee chair Tony Lambert said the issue remains a concern for the committee.

To report a graffiti incident to police, call (905) 878-5511 and ask for the communications room to have an officer sent out to the scene. To reach Crime Stoppers call 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

To notify the Town that its property has been vandalized with graffiti, call the Engineering Services department at (905) 878-7252, ext. 2500.

Melanie Hennessey can be reached at mhennessy@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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