

## Facilities Management from A to Z



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### **G**raffiti

The term graffiti derives from the Italian *graffio* meaning 'scratching' and can be defined as uninvited markings or writing scratched or applied to objects, built structures and natural features. Graffiti is a phenomenon which can be found on ancient structures around the world, in some cases predating the Greeks and Romans. Historical examples now have a significance of their own, and can throw light on the society of the period. Despite its long history, graffiti is a problem for facility managers that has become particularly pervasive over the last fifty years as a result of the availability of cheap and quick means of mark-making.

It is usually considered a priority to remove graffiti as quickly as possible after it occurs. This is for two reasons: the first is to prevent copy-cat emulation which can occur rapidly once a clean surface is defaced. The second reason is that as paints, glues and inks dry-out over time they can become increasingly difficult to remove.

The owner of a building that has been subjected to graffiti attack should record details of the graffiti (the type of media used, the area affected, the type and condition of the surface it is on) and the time and manner of its execution, if known. Photographs are useful to record graffiti incidences and may assist the police in bringing a prosecution. Such images are also required for insurance claims, and can be helpful to cleaning operatives to see the problem area before arriving on-site.

The police should be informed as there may be other related incidences occurring locally. An incidence pattern can identify possible culprits and stylised signatures or nicknames, known as "Tags", may already be familiar to local police.

Before attempting cleaning it may be advisable to carry out a trial to avoid undesirable damage to the surface concerned. These usually involve testing a range of methods and should be carried out on a small, unobtrusive area, if possible. Cleaning trials should always start with the least aggressive solution, usually water, and stop once a successful method has been found. Test results and methodology should be noted for future reference.

Treatment of the area should be undertaken using the most effective method found in the cleaning trials. Care should be taken to comply with health and safety legislation with regard to both the protection of people carrying out the cleaning and of passers-by. Operatives should follow product guidelines in terms of application and removal, and wear the appropriate protective equipment. Measures must be taken to ensure run-off, aerial mists, drips and splashes do not threaten unprotected members of the public.

*The Anti-Graffiti Association (AGA) promotes best practice in the management of graffiti, vandalism and related crime, through a combined approach of research, education and communication.*  
[www.theaga.org.uk](http://www.theaga.org.uk)