

Springdale responds forcefully to graffiti problem by [Doug Smith](#)

- **CLEANING UP:** *The city pays.*

Many cities have a graffiti problem. Few respond as forcefully as Springdale.

The city has bought an \$11,000 piece of equipment, and assigned one city employee, making \$12 an hour, to fulltime graffiti removal. The city attorney, Jeff Harper, has drafted legislation that would give law enforcement more firepower to use against the parents of juvenile "taggers." That bill (HB 1010) is now in the Judiciary Committee of the state House of Representatives. It's sponsored by Rep. Jon Woods of Springdale.

The city leaps on graffiti as soon as it's discovered. "The sooner you get it off, the more discouraging it is to taggers," says Sam Goade, Springdale's public works director. "A graffiti tagger wants his work to be seen. If they put it on at 9 o'clock Monday night, and we're taking it off by 10 o'clock Tuesday morning, they've pretty well wasted their time."

"Every incident of graffiti is investigated by the Police Department," Goade said. "When they're done, they issue a work order." The removal apparatus is a trailer-mounted high-pressure sprayer that can heat the water to very high temperatures. There's a sandblaster attachment.

Grffiti is removed at no cost to the property owner. Until last year, a property owner was required by the city to remove graffiti at his own expense. "The onus of cleaning up graffiti fell on the victim," says Mayor Doug Sprouse. "That didn't seem right." (In Little Rock, and most other Arkansas cities, the owner of private property still is responsible for removing graffiti. Most of these cities don't have a graffiti problem the size of Springdale's.)

Harper said there'd been a big increase in graffiti at Springdale in the last four or five years. Goade said that graffiti is "kind of cyclical," but in good weather, the city might have three or four incidents a day. Most of the taggers are Latino, Harper said, "but we've caught some white males too." The Latino population of Springdale has increased greatly in recent years. Some of the graffiti is gang-related, Harper said, and some more an attempt to be artistic.

HB 1010 says that up to \$5,000 in civil damages can be collected from the parents of anyone under 18 who defaces, damages or destroys property. Previously, civil damages could be awarded only if property was destroyed. Parents of young taggers already can be held liable in juvenile court, but liability in civil court "gives us another tool," Harper said. "California has a law like this. They're years ahead of us in dealing with graffiti."

Taggers may be prosecuted as adults or juveniles, depending on the circumstances. Harper said that if his office prosecutes a tagger as an adult, "We seek one year in jail. That's the maximum." The prosecuting attorney handles juvenile court prosecutions. A juvenile court might order a tagger to clean off what he's done and repaint the property.

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