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VICTORIA POLICE AND CASEY COUNCIL TARGET GRAFFITI

The writing is on the wall for Casey's graffiti vandals with local council and Victoria Police working together to target the costly crime.

Since November, the Casey Regional Response Team, based at Narre Warren Police Station, has been working with the City of Casey's Graffiti Working Party to identify graffiti vandals and gather sufficient evidence to apprehend them.

The working party includes members of Casey Council's Community Safety Team, Victoria Police and the Council's graffiti removal contractor, Urban Maintenance Services.

Since November, police have arrested and charged 10 people with hundreds of graffiti related offences.

These relate to more than \$120,000 worth of criminal damage in the City of Casey.

Upon conviction, Victoria Police, on behalf of Casey Council, plan to submit a claim for restitution from vandals to repay the cleaning costs.

The City of Casey introduced its Graffiti Management Program in 2002. An integral part of the program involves council staff photographing each incident of graffiti and entering it onto a data base to help identify offenders and the cost of the damage incurred by their vandalism.

The database now holds thousands of images, which Victoria Police are using to link graffiti artists to crime scenes.

Since November, the Casey Regional Response Unit has executed numerous search warrants as part of the operation, seizing a large amount of evidence in the form of computers, digital cameras and mobile phones used for storing graffiti 'tags.'

Many of those apprehended have also been charged with other offences such as theft of and from motorcar and drug offences.

•On Monday 26 February, an 18-year-old Narre Warren man was charged with numerous offences, including criminal damage, possessing articles for criminal damage and trespass. The charges relate to graffiti committed on trains, walls and factories in the City of Casey, with the clean up bill already exceeding \$23,000. Restitution for this amount will be applied for in court upon conviction.

The arrest followed the execution of a search warrant at a Narre Warren home where spray cans, sketches of graffiti and photographs of graffiti were located as evidence. He was bailed to Dandenong Magistrates Court in May.

- In January an 18-year-old Hampton Park woman was also charged with more than 100 criminal offences, in relation to \$20,000 worth of graffiti at the Hampton Park shopping precinct.

- Cranbourne CIU arrested and charged two Berwick teenagers late last year in relation to a four year graffiti spree. The men, aged 16 and 18, have each been charged with more than 100 acts of criminal damage against trains and property throughout Casey, Cardinia Shire, Greater Dandenong and metropolitan Melbourne. The clean up bill has already exceeded \$50,000.

- Narre Warren Police arrested a 19-year-old man in relation to a theft from motor car last year. When he was being interviewed, he inscribed a graffiti tag on a desk in the police station. Police searched the data base for this tag and as a result the man was charged with 30 counts of theft from motor car but also more than 30 counts of criminal damage.

Casey Police Inspector Bob Hill said following the recent series of graffiti arrests in Casey similar policing initiatives would now be implemented in Cardinia and Greater Dandenong.

“These acts of graffiti are criminal and are costing Casey ratepayers in excess of \$140,000 in unnecessary clean up costs each year,” Insp Hill said.

“The City of Casey is leading the way in managing graffiti and we will continue to work in partnership with them to target this serious community issue,” Insp Hill said.

“This behaviour will simply not be tolerated and we encourage residents to report all instances of graffiti to Council’s 24-hour graffiti hotline, 1800 VANDAL, or ring 000 in cases where vandals are still at the scene.

“I also encourage parents to take an interest in the activities of their children and discourage them from engaging in this criminal activity.”

City of Casey Cr Colin Butler agreed that Council’s zero tolerance policy on graffiti is paying off.

“Over the past five years the City of Casey’s Graffiti Management Program has led the way in tackling this important social issue. We are committed to this program and these types of partnerships with the Police and key stakeholders to deliver strong results.”

“This recent joint operation with Council’s Community Safety Team and Casey Police to target vandals responsible for graffiti in Casey required a high level of confidentiality to have the maximum chance of succeeding. As a result vandals are being apprehended and called to account, which is great news for our community and our street scapes.”

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Not for publication:

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