



DURHAM



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CITY OF MEDICINE



Updated Gang Assessment

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Graffiti

Graffiti

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Graffiti

In many communities gang problems are highly visible and graffiti is one of the most common signs. Gang graffiti instills fear among residents – not only those who live in an area and suffer this property damage, but others who may drive through locations with graffiti.

Graffiti reduces property values and conveys a loss of informal and formal social control, making it seem as if neither law enforcement nor residents are in control of an area.

Durham’s graffiti eradication program is run by the Neighborhood Improvement Services’ Impact Team. The city’s approach to graffiti eradication is prompt reporting and removal. Durham’s approach is particularly innovative, in that the city bears the cost of removal, even from private property. Because gang graffiti often contributes to public fears about gangs, Durham’s proactive approach is exemplary, and is beneficial in removing some of these fears.

Many jurisdictions in the U.S. require that property owners quickly remove graffiti from their property, or the owners must pay for removal by an eradication team. Noncompliance may result in a fine.¹ Placing this burden on property owners often results in delays and inherent difficulties in gaining compliance from property owners, especially absentee landlords, elderly residents and or low income property owners.

Challenges of Graffiti Removal in Durham²

Graffiti removal crews such as the City of Durham’s Impact Team face unique challenges. Removal involves the use of trailer-mounted equipment, and many graffiti locations present accessibility issues. These locations include trails, railways, drainage ways, overpasses and rear utility easements.

Stormwater regulations are becoming increasingly stringent, and graffiti removal teams must now collect and contain wash liquids before they reach storm sewers, streams or other waterways.

In the past, graffiti was photographed by the Impact Team and these photographs were submitted to the Durham Police Department for analysis to determine if it was “gang related”. This practice was discontinued due to the extra time it took and the lack of resources at the police department to perform analysis.

¹ Weisel, D.L. (2002). *Contemporary Gangs: An Organizational Analysis*. New York, NY: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC.

² Thanks to Daryl Hedgepeth (Impact Team Manager/Neighborhood Improvement Services – City of Durham) who provided this information on February 4, 2014

Amount of Graffiti Removed in Durham

For the 3-year period (2011 – 2013), the Impact Team performed 1,404 graffiti removal operations. In an effort to classify the amount of graffiti at each operation, the Impact Team identifies the number of symbols or words. The range of this classification for 2011 to 2013 is 1 to 350, with the average being 1.5 per operation. So, it appears that many of the operations involve the removal of a singular symbol or word. Certainly, not all graffiti contains references to gang activity, in fact much of it is artistic in nature and some graffiti of this nature may cover many square feet. This makes classification based on symbols or words difficult.

There was a 45% increase in graffiti removal operations between 2012 and 2013. Given that the size and mission of the Impact Team remained the same during the time period, the increase can probably be attributed to an actual increase of graffiti in Durham. The table below shows the number of graffiti removal operations in Durham for the past three years.

Table D1 – Graffiti Removal Operations (2011 – 2013)

Year	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>
Operations	366	324	714

Graffiti per Police Districts

As previously mentioned, graffiti removal operations increased city-wide by 220% between 2012 and 2013. There was significant variance in the increase between police districts. The table below shows the total number of removal operations for the 3-year period and the percentage increase from 2012 to 2013.

Table D2 – Graffiti Removal Operations per Police District³

	<u>Dist.1</u>	<u>Dist.2</u>	<u>Dist.3</u>	<u>Dist.4</u>	<u>Dist.5</u>
Total Operations (2011 – 2013)	302	311	225	308	258
% increase in operations between 2012 and 2013	+41%	+84%	+61%	+222%	+120%

The map on the following page shows graffiti removal operation locations for 2012 (n = 324). Some locations had multiple removal operations during the course of the year. Much of the activity was clustered north and east of downtown, and in the downtown area.

³ The Business Improvement District (BID) also contracts with a firm named BLOCK by BLOCK for cleanup, sticker removal and paint removal. Data provided by that contractor indicates they removed paint graffiti at 275 locations in 2012/13. Since the BID is mostly comprised of downtown, it can be assumed that District 5 graffiti removal operations are greater than shown in the table of Impact Team operations.

Graffiti Map

Map D1 – 2012 Graffiti Locations

Graffiti Locations

