

Graffiti:

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is reported, and some are reported multiple times. The problem waxes and wanes, the timing difficult to nail down, the chief said in March.

"And right now, it is a boil on the butt of this city," he said.

City ordinance puts the burden of graffiti removal on the property owner, giving the owner two business days to get the paint covered up, although officials work with owners on that timeline.

In a sense, the ordinance victimizes the building owner twice, the chief said, "but we need a way to entice the owner to take action."

There is a volunteer corp, Milton-Freewater Graffiti Busters, that helps owners with donated painting supplies, a power washer, an old truck to haul it all and muscle to apply the coverup paint.

Their efforts are a big help to the city, Schaffner said.

The founder of the group declined to be identified for this story.

Recently, the first Sherwood Trust leadership class based in Milton-Freewater, part of a program created by the nonprofit foundation meant to develop community leadership skills in people, chose gang tagging and street art as its project.

How that will look is unshaped for now, said class member Dave Dahlin, but the class is likely to take an approach of how to help building owners avoid unwanted spray painting.

"We don't see much tagging where things are well kept up and well lit," Dahlin said, adding his group is discussing details such as aesthetics and better lighting.

"We don't expect to solve the big issues of the town," he said. "However, we do believe in the impact of starting something positive and small, and shifting the downward part of the cycle to upward."

City government itself can't be the whole solution to



Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

Sprayed and peeling paint mix Feb. 16, 2022, on a commercial building in Milton-Freewater, the cans of evidence dropped on the ground.

the problem and neither can volunteers, Boedigheimer said, and each of his officers only can be in one place at a time.

Even then, arrests are rarely a deterrent — the courts are so backlogged, a property offender is not going to spend the night in jail, he said.

"If someone has a solution, tell me," Boedigheimer said. "God knows we want to hear that."

Even Portland's education campaign against graffiti years ago netted an arrest rate of less than 0.1% of the number of incidents, he said.

"There are 2,500 buildings in this town, each with four sides," he said. "You do the math on being able to see it happening."

When school is out and teens are often under less supervision, that's when the cans of paint seem to come out, Schaffner noted.

No store that sells the product can really stop youth from getting it, he said.

"If kids can get alcohol, they can get spray paint," he said.

Everybody pays

In Oregon, "unlawfully applying graffiti" comes under intentional property damage and is a Class A violation.

In the eyes of the law, "graffiti" means any inscriptions, words, figures or designs that are marked, etched, scratched, drawn, painted, pasted or otherwise affixed to the surface of property.

A judge can impose fines and up to 100 community service hours. That time must include removing graffiti, either defacement made by the defendant or graffiti created by someone else.

Possessing "a graffiti implement" — be it paint, ink, chalk, dye or another substance meant to spray, mark, etch, scratch or carve surfaces — is a Class C violation under state law and can net an offender fines and up to 50 hours of community service.

In Deschutes County in Central Oregon, for example, there is no cost for graffiti removal services. When a report comes in, a Sheriff's Office staff helps the property owner remove or cover the paint. If that owner doesn't have paint or can't afford it, the department does its best to color match through donated paint or buys it directly from local suppliers.

The county's juvenile justice department sees graffiti removal as "one of its best examples of restorative justice," its website says.

Cleaning up the paint (and other acts of vandalism) engages kids in problem solving and gives them an opportunity to help victims and their community in a meaningful, visible way. "The youth and our community can see immediate results of their service, a result that is both tangible and gratifying," Deschutes County officials said.

In Weston this past winter, code enforcement officer Jack Jasperson oversaw a group of teens as they wire-brushed their own graffiti off concrete, a little at a time.

It was fortunate other students had come forward to let officials know of the unsolicited art, Jasperson told the Weston City Council.

Having to clean up after themselves, then report what they'd learned to the council, was a fitting and effective answer, Jasperson said then.

In Milton-Freewater, Boedigheimer seconds the involvement of the teens responsible for the problem. He also firmly believes more opportunities for youth, coupled with parent involvement, could significantly reduce gang tagging, he said.

But decades into his career, Boedigheimer has found many parents are outright frightened of their children and don't have the ability to modify bad behavior or take control of the situation, he said.

"You take a gang member wannabe and a scared parent ...," he said.

Such teens call the shots on when and where they spray paint, the chief said, explaining that in many taggings, the symbols are a secret language sending messages to those able to decode them.

On the flip side of the coin are angry property owners who expect law enforcement to solve the issue, Boedigheimer said.

"The smaller the community, the less crime it takes to make everything seem really bad. But we are no different than Portland, except on a microscopic scale. We are a real city, and people are getting fed up," he said. "This is like homelessness: You're always chasing the tail of this monster. Until society, small or giant, wants to step up and take pride in their properties, we'll always be losing this."

The current, aggressive phase of gang tagging will pass at some point, Boedigheimer said.

"But it will pass much faster," he said, "if property owners will cover it up."

UAS:

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a Cessna wheel fell off or when a crosswind blew over a plane. If you call us we certainly respond. But we're not the National Transportation Safety Board."

Chrisman and Corbett said the test range was committed to safety but would not go out of its way to advertise crashes, especially because they were happening in sparsely populated areas and did not hurt anyone. Corbett said some of these incidents were like when "an ambulance backs into a car in a parking lot," a situation that might generate a 911 call but not a public record.

Range Manager Darryl Abling said the UAS range makes a record of every test operation and sends the data to officials at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the institution that oversees Oregon's test range system, who then forward it to the Federal Aviation Administration. A crash might trigger an extra layer of reporting to the FAA or NTSB depending on the severity of the incident, but not every malfunction or emergency landing needed to be cataloged.

Abling also said he didn't

know where Bloomberg sourced its information, but its reporting didn't align with the range's internal data.

The Pendleton Fire Department responds to any fires at the airport, but Fire Chief Jim Critchley said he defers any details about the cause of the fires to range staff, comparing it to the way he would defer to St. Anthony Hospital when the department's work intersects with the hospital's.

Critchley said he continues to explore ways to staff Pendleton Fire Station No. 3, the station at the Pendleton airport. In the meantime, Critchley said the department intends to relocate its interns to housing at the airport. The interns will serve as reserves in their off time, allowing them to potentially respond to fires at the airport during those periods.

Eastern Oregon Regional Airport Manager John Honemann on April 13 reported 15 companies were using the UAS Range that day, either as resident or itinerant clients. The range conducts 500 to 1,000 operations per month. Chrisman said the Pendleton range could be the busiest in the world and the number of tests at the range looks to triple this year.

BMCC:

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At a time when BMCC is facing increasing competition from nearby community colleges in Washington and trade schools, Brownning said the staffing cuts could actually help with recruitment.

"We're not actually offering fewer classes," he said "We're having fewer people offer the classes that we do currently have, and we'll be offering new and different approaches to some of the outcomes so that (students are) better

employable upon completion. The assertion that we're offering fewer classes is simply not borne out in the data."

While BMCC is holding firm on its cuts, the faculty union is not treating them as a settled issue. Hernberg said the union plans to explore its legal options and is also planning a "vigorous" public campaign to convince the college to reconsider its plans.

"We believe that there is a sacred trust between this community, these educators and our students, and we're going to do everything we can to protect that," he said.

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