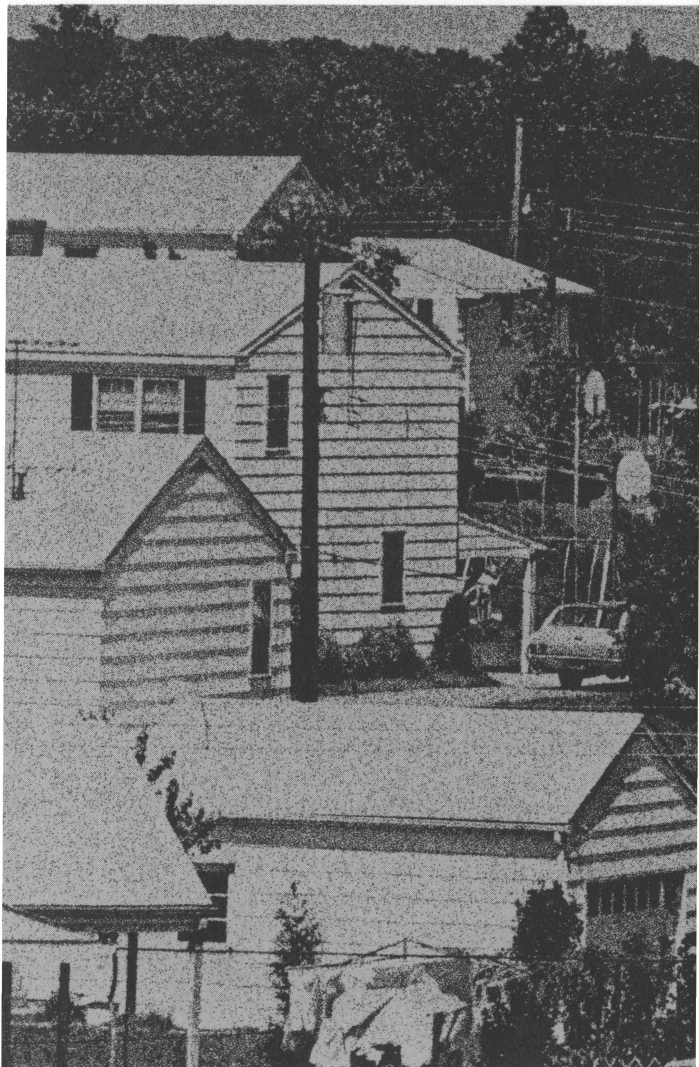


Vandalism

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR HOME AND PROPERTY FROM VANDALS

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**Texas
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Vandalism is a growing national problem. Last year this senseless crime cost United States citizens more than \$1 billion.

Vandalism gets to everyone in some form or another. It can affect your family, friends, property, community and your pocketbook.

The more you know about vandalism, the more you can make it a crime that is more trouble than it's worth.

What Is Vandalism?

Vandalism is the deliberate defacement, mutilation or destruction of private or public property. It is not a "harmless prank." Vandals are criminals because they destroy property, waste time and money, and cause suffering and death. While millions of incidents of vandalism are reported every year, at least twice as many incidents are not reported.

Who Is the Vandal?

More than half of the crimes associated with vandalism occur in high schools. There is no typical vandal. Vandals can be good or bad students, girls or boys, whites or blacks, rich or poor.

Most children arrested for vandalism are between 13 and 14. However, children as young as 6 and 7 vandalize schools and park areas. Teenagers with growing-up problems act destructively by misusing vehicles, spray-painting graffiti in public places, and so forth. Older youths often commit more serious acts such as damaging vehicles or machinery, burglary, arson or theft.

Why Do People Vandalize?

Although most vandals do not have a clear motive for their acts, studies show that basic social problems and attitudes are at the root of vandalism. Among the many explanations for the crime are anger against society, boredom, drug and alcohol abuse, disciplinary problems, personal problems and racial/political conflicts.

How Can Vandalism Affect My Family and Friends

- The innocent bystander who is often a victim of a vandal's activities could easily be you or someone close to you.
- Many young people are readily influenced by their peers. By joining the groups of teenagers who are vandalizing out of boredom or are trying to impress other teenagers, your child could end up with a police record instead of a diploma.
- In 1978 — vandalism cost schools in the United States over \$460 million or \$13 per student. The cost of your taxes could rise unnecessarily or the quality of your child's education could be lowered as a result of temporary school closings and equipment shortages.

How Does Vandalism Affect My Community?

- Police, fire and emergency services are affected by the direct damage, increased work loads and false alarms.
- Facilities, such as parks and public rest rooms that everyone in the community uses, become unavailable or dangerous.
- The court system is affected by the strain of time-consuming hearings and trials which jeopardize a defendant's right to a fair and speedy trial.

How Does Vandalism Affect My Pocketbook?

- Taxes go up when public property has to be repaired and replaced.
- Your insurance may cover damage to your personal property, but rates will increase if vandalism becomes rampant in your neighborhood.
- According to a Small Business Administration Report, more than \$814 million has been lost as a result of vandalism. If you own a business, you will have to pay part of the cost of this damage. Even if

you don't own a business, part of that cost will be passed on to you through higher prices.

How Can I Keep Vandalism from Getting to Me?

Teach by Example

As a parent, you are responsible for your child's behavior. U.S. House Bill No. 2 states that parents can be held financially responsible up to \$1,000 for acts of vandalism committed by their children. Setting a good example is the best way to influence your children to behave properly.

- Respect the law, plus other people's rights and property.
- Don't offer excuses for lawlessness; don't be indifferent to it.
- Don't break laws, no matter how small (for example, traffic rules).

Protect Your Personal Property

- Keep garage locked.
- Use outdoor lighting.

Report Incidents

- Report suspicious persons or activities near your home or your neighbor's home to your local police.
- Report to authorities if you spot unusual activities at odd hours near your school, church or other buildings. Work with your local newspaper and radio stations to emphasize the nature and extent of the problem. Encourage them to publish a weekly "destruction list" enumerating acts of vandalism and the cost to taxpayers.
- If you are confronted by vandals, cooperate with your local police force to see that they are caught and punished.

Get Involved

- Encourage your family and friends to join anti-vandalism organizations. Neighbors can plan preventive measures against vandalism such as watching each other's property, patrolling the neighborhood, and reporting any suspicious ac-

tivities. Such programs are already in effect in several cities in the U.S.

- Become active in youth programs which provide young people with constructive alternatives to vandalism and enable them to take pride in their neighborhoods instead of destroying them. These include neighborhood beautification programs, community camping trips, basketball teams, theatrical groups or Youth Service Corps, where young people serve as public safety aids and are often paid for their services. Some schools and local PTA's are planning youth juries, where students try their peers for their crimes in a court environment and assign punishment such as park clean-up, chores at the police or fire departments, community agencies or schools. You can also help develop counseling centers or anti-vandalism campaigns in schools or assist other youth groups such as 4-H, the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, Boys Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters or other youth oriented community service organizations.

Be Aware

Your child will probably be exposed to vandals in his or her school. Discourage him or her from participating in their activities.

- Give your child enough attention. Give plenty of love as well as discipline.
- Encourage his or her activities, recognize successes and help the child learn from failures. (Vandalism is not a problem only among young males.)
- Be aware of who the child's friends are and know how he or she spends time. Give advice when needed.
- If your child begins to develop serious personal problems, such as difficulties in relationships or drug or alcohol problems, get professional counseling. It can keep minor problems from becoming major difficulties.

Now you know how vandalism can get to you. Take the time to protect your family, your community and your possessions from vandals. Make crime more trouble than it's worth.

Adapted with permission from material prepared by the Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Governor's Office, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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