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Anti-graffiti activists infuriated by pro-spray demonstration

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August 20, 2008 12:00am

A MOVE against laws banning graffiti spray cans has angered police and Melbourne's anti-graffiti groups.

More than 200 sprayers are taking their protest to the streets via an exhibition and street art demonstrations at a north suburban railway station.

Organisers of the **Don't Ban the Can** campaign want reforms to new legislation that give police power to search anyone 14 or older for spray cans, and also to slap a \$550 on-the-spot fine on anyone carrying spray cans on or near public transport.

But anti-graffiti groups have slammed the event as destructive and a breeding ground for graffiti vandals.

Hundreds of people are expected to attend the midday-to-midnight event, to be held on September 20 at a warehouse owned by one of the organisers.

It's at the entrance of Jewell station, on the Upfield line.

Live bands, street art, graffiti painting, hip-hop music, DJs and break-dancers are expected to attract the masses, who'll be urged to sign petitions to scrap parts of the law, which came into effect in April and June.

Permits are being sought from Moreland City Council, which said it would throw its support behind the event once all applications had been made.



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Mayor **Joe Caputo** said the council encouraged a celebration of street art, which was prominent in Brunswick and part of the area's culture.

"**Moreland City Council** does not support vandals who deface and damage property with mindless tagging," he said.

"However, we do recognise and support graffiti artists.

"There is a place in our city for freedom of expression and creativity. The distinction between the two groups must be made," he said.

Sprayer and organiser Jeremy Gaschk, 22, said the day was also to educate the public about the legitimate value of street art, as opposed to graffiti vandalism.

"Melbourne is quite a vibrant, colourful city and street art and graffiti is a key contributing factor to the very culture bringing interstate and international tourists to our city," he said.

Co-organiser Gerard Hindle said some of the new laws reversed the presumption of innocence, forcing genuine artists, students, and even the elderly to prove they were not guilty of an offence if found with a can of spray paint.

Sprayers said the new laws made it virtually impossible for them to carry cans in public and exposed them to huge fines.

But Police Minister **Bob Cameron** said graffiti was not art, and the laws were introduced to deter vandals who were committing a serious crime.

Graffiti Hurts Australia spokesman Scott Hilditch said street art and graffiti were both vandalism. "Vandals are trying to legitimise what they do. They cost the country \$500 million a year," he said.

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