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### Vandalism canned in hills

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Real estate agent Jim Conder says the new Belgrave toilets are a white elephant. MICHELLE KELCEY N50FP30

THE new public toilets in Belgrave have been vandalised just weeks after opening.

Repairs will cost about \$2000 after vandals broke a tap, placed an object in a toilet causing a blockage and scrawled graffiti on toilet doors.

And traders in Belgrave have reacted angrily, saying they are sick of people defacing their town.

The new unisex toilets near Puffing Billy were only opened at the start of May - with vandals striking over the weekend of May 23 and 24. Belgrave Traders Association president Donna Burgess said the graffiti problem in the area was an ongoing source of frustration to traders.

"People are becoming more and more brazen."

Ms Burgess said last week one of the traders caught a graffiti vandal defacing a car in broad daylight. Jim Conder from Belgrave's Ranges First National Real Estate said the new public toilets were an easy target for vandals because they were not locked overnight.

The \$199,000 loos on Old Monbulk Rd were built with support from Victoria Police to provide extra safety through Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. But Mr Conder said the toilets were a waste of money, and a white elephant. He said vandalism and graffiti were widespread in Belgrave, with empty bottles and overflowing bins making the town look dirty and depressing, especially for the large number of tourists visiting Puffing Billy.

Yarra Ranges Crime prevention officer Leading Sen-Constable Linda Hancock said graffiti had increased in the past couple of months across the shire.

She was planning to work with traders and the Shire of Yarra Ranges to think of alternative ways to stop the problem, including establishing a national database of offenders.

Council spokesman James Martin said a council staff member was on site Wednesday to assess the damage and remove the graffiti.

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