



Black art's \$100m price tag, graffiti hits NSW councils

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By Vikki Campion, Urban Affairs Reporter
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DESPERATE councils are taking drastic measures to stop a \$100-million-a-year vandalism scourge - including hiring private security to guard buildings overnight.

Ratepayers are being hit with six-figure cleaning bills and up to \$350 per night for private security to guard potential targets.

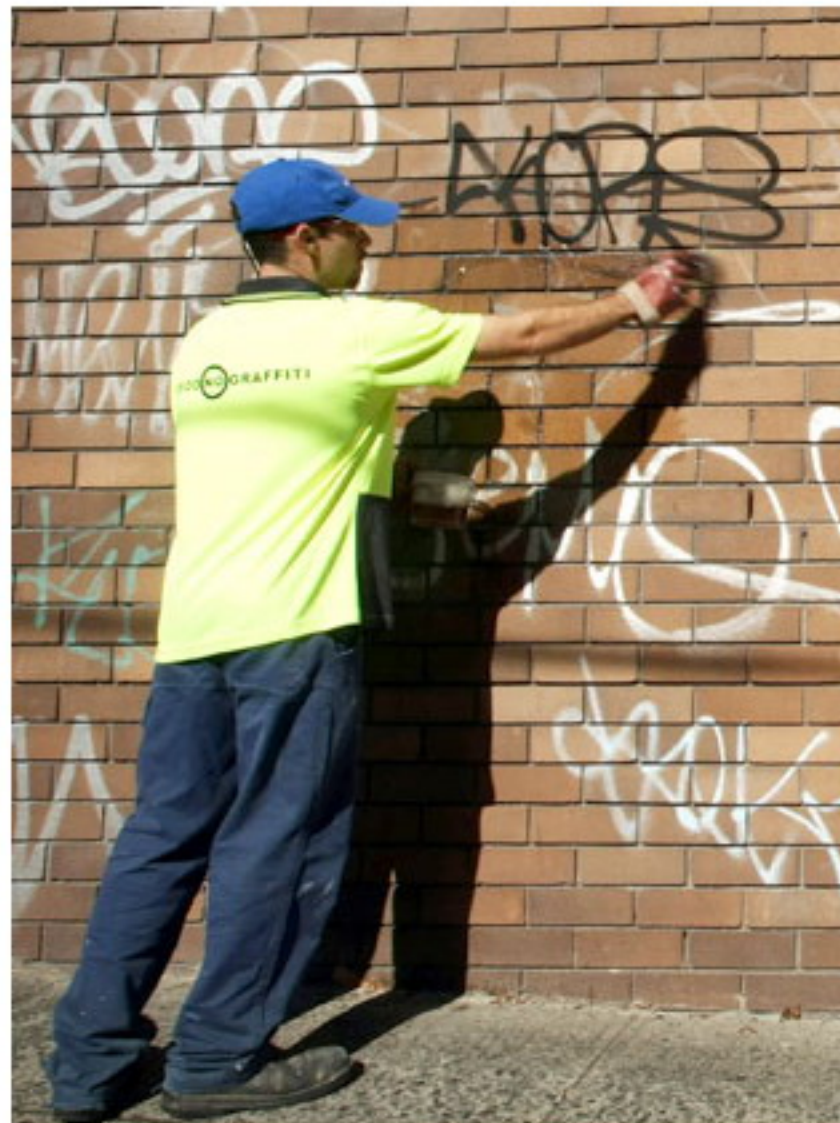
Vandals have nothing to say, so they scribble

Thousands more are being spent on websites, education, and "graffiti resistant" paint and tougher playground equipment.

The number of malicious damage incidents last year rose to 109,330 across NSW - a 13 per cent increase in five years. Sydney City, the western suburbs of Blacktown, Campbelltown, Penrith, Liverpool, Parramatta, Bankstown and Fairfield, and coastal cities including Newcastle, Wollongong, Lake Macquarie, Wyong and Gosford, are the hardest hit.

Tough new laws came in this year making a person who maliciously destroys or damages property liable to five years in jail. But the maximum penalty for graffiti is a \$2200 fine or six months in jail. Sydney's mayors say that is not enough.

Beachside councils are calling for youths caught tagging to be made to scrub it off themselves and for Attorney-General John Hatzistergos to bring in harsher penalties.



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