SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

GRAFFITI STRIKE FORCE

OPERATIONS MANUAL

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May 2026

INTRODUCTION

The San Diego Police Department, with the support of the City of San Diego Administration, implemented the Graffiti Strike Force (GSF) in order to address one of the biggest problems in San Diego – Graffiti. Graffiti related crimes create an aesthetic and economic hardship for businesses and communities in San Diego. Annually the costs run into the millions of dollars for the city and its citizens. Communities and businesses hit with graffiti symbolize a sense of lawlessness and invites other criminal activity. GSF is aimed at suppressing graffiti crimes in San Diego.

GSF's primary responsibilities are investigating crimes committed by members of the gang sets it monitors; tracking criminal activity by tagging groups emerging as criminal street gangs; investigating reported incidents of graffiti; and preparing prosecution reports for the City and District Attorney. Several of these sets have been involved in homicides and serious assaults. GSF is also tracking several other tagging groups that are developing into criminal street gangs, but have yet to meet the legal criteria for documentation. GSF handles all of the same investigative follow-up with these groups as the other investigative teams within the Street Gang Unit. This often includes all Cal-Gangs updates/tracking, graffiti investigations of all documented street gangs and any felony crime investigation and callouts related to the gangs and emerging gang they monitor.

MISSION

Suppress graffiti related crimes through a campaign of aggressive investigations holding suspects accountable both criminally and financially.

GOALS

Address one of the top neighborhood concerns of citizens and business owners in San Diego by documenting and investigating graffiti crimes city-wide, and by building partnerships with victims and witnesses in order to proactively suppress graffiti crimes and hold the suspects accountable.

ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS

Investigating graffiti crimes is time consuming and difficult, often resulting in no arrests. The San Diego Police Department formed the Graffiti Strike Force (GSF) to deal with graffiti related problems and suspects citywide. GSF consists of one officer, one detectives, and a detective sergeant. GSF officers conduct an aggressive proactive campaign of documenting graffiti crimes in their areas of responsibility. Many victims have almost become "accustomed" to being tagged at their home or business and just paint over the damage without notifying the police. With GSF showing communities that the San Diego Police Department has taken an interest in addressing graffiti crimes, the citizens will assist GSF in the intelligence and identification of graffiti crimes and suspects.

The benefits of GSF include:

Increased Productivity:

GSF officers will assist, if available, with graffiti related investigations in their respective areas. Each GSF officer will respond when requested by patrol officers who have suspect(s) detained or in custody for graffiti related crimes. GSF will maintain partnerships with prosecutors in order to streamline the conviction process.

Cost Effectiveness:

Graffiti crimes annually cost the City of San Diego millions of dollars. This does not include losses to Caltrans, San Diego City Schools, businesses, and private citizens. In the past, graffiti crimes went unreported, leaving the victims to pay the repair bills. National statistics show that graffiti costs cities over twelve billion dollars a year.

Convicted suspects will be held accountable for the damage criminally and financially. The courts will order the suspects to pay restitution, allowing the victims to recover their losses.

Improved Documentation and Evidence Collection Techniques:

The Graffiti Strike Force begin using the Graffiti Tracker program in 2011. Through this program, many graffiti crimes are being reported via telephone to the City of San Diego's Graffiti Hotline. The Graffiti Tracker program allows citizens to call in a graffiti complaint, which results in the City of San Diego or Urban Corps personnel photographing, and later removing the graffiti. This process eliminates the traditional graffiti reporting process and allows Graffiti Detectives to locate and address additional graffiti and taggers, or tag crews, throughout the City more efficiently.

GSF uses the latest new technology available today. GSF uses digital cameras, photo quality printers, lap top computers and the Graffiti Tracker program.

Taking several quality images is now more efficient and cost effective using the digital equipment. Then the images are printed out on inexpensive brochure paper

for detectives and prosecutors. Both prosecutors and defense attorneys have been impressed at the quality of the images produced by the new process.

Increased Organizational Understanding:

GSF has initiated a campaign to train patrol officers throughout the department, and neighboring agencies, by providing handouts and brochures with up to date crime trend information. GSF has trained, and will continue to train, prosecutors regarding current graffiti crimes and trends on the street. All up to date information will be up loaded on the AFR system giving every officer access to the latest information.

Tracking Effectiveness:

GSF officers monitor, track, and maintain intelligence on tagging crews and suspects throughout the city. GSF officers constantly exchange information and intelligence on tagging crews and suspects throughout the divisions in order to be more effective identifying crime trends and wanted suspects. Additionally, it provides knowledge on individuals who make the transition from tagger to tag banger or gang member.

GRAFFITI STRIKE FORCE RESPONSIBILITIES

GSF is comprised of a detective sergeant, one detective, and one officer. The chain of command is through the Street Gang Unit lieutenant.

The detective sergeant coordinates the team's activity. The detective sergeant must possess the ability to keep officers and detectives working and functioning smoothly while reporting to the command staff.

Responsibilities of the detective sergeant include the following:

1. **Assignment of cases and assignments:**

    - Assign the cases to the appropriate GSF officer.
    - Ensure GSF officers are aware of community meetings or events.

2. **Administrative and supervisory duties:**

    - Be responsible for all administrative and personnel related matters.
    - Prepare the officers' evaluations, approve time off and vacations, handle CCF's, discipline, issue subpoenas, and provide the officers with career guidance and advice.
    - Review and approve all crime, arrest/JCR, and investigator's reports prepared by GSF personnel.

3. **Monitor daily activity of GSF officers:**

- Daily schedules.
- Approve and coordinate tactical action plans, plain-clothes operations, and "Sting" operations.
- Be present during the service of search warrants, 4th waiver searches, and arrests warrants.

4. **Facilitate compiling statistical data:**

    - Liaison with the area station command staff in order keep them aware of current crime trends.
    - Collect crime and arrest information to be made available to area commands upon request.
    - Be available to provide statistical data on the GSF unit and current crime trends. The data will be distributed to concerned city administrators and command staff upon request.
    - Ensure contact is maintained with the Graffiti Control Program Manager (Currently Transportation and Storm Water) to accomplish the following: address the city administration's concern regarding graffiti in specific districts, identify possible crimes trends or series, coordinate graffiti paint out of areas targeted for surveillance operations, utilize Code Compliance Officers to assist with identifying high graffiti areas, and provide the City administration with feedback on the GSF's accomplishments and statistics.

5. **Coordinate training:**

    - Coordinate any requests for graffiti related training to officers, prosecutors, and citizens through community meetings.
    - Be available to work with in-service training in order to schedule a Graffiti Training Menu Class for Officers County wide.

TRAINING OF UNIT PERSONNEL

Officers selected to the Graffiti Strike Force receive two weeks of unit specific training from a senior GSF officer prior to assuming the responsibility of an entire division. GSF recognizes each officer will bring a different knowledge base and background to the unit. Therefore, training is focused on the individual officer's needs. The training covers the following topics:

1. **Introduction to the Unit:**

    - The detective sergeant explains the unit expectations and duties to the new officer and designates a senior GSF officer to train the new officer.

2. **New Officer Training:**

- Officers receive training in reading and interpreting graffiti along with an understanding of the graffiti/tagger subculture.

3. **Investigative Aids:**

   - Officers are given printed resources to aid in investigating graffiti crimes. The resources include, but are not limited to: graffiti laws, crime case narratives, search warrants, suspect interview questions and a list of GSF prosecutors.
   - Officers are provided a list of documented tagging crews throughout the City.
   - Officers are trained in preparing a comprehensive investigative packet tailored for the specific prosecuting agency.

4. **Digital Imaging and Printing Equipment:**

   - Officers are trained in the use of digital cameras, photo printer and imaging software.

5. **Computer Systems:**

   - Officers are trained in the use of the Graffiti Tracker.
   - At the end of this section officers have a working knowledge of the District Attorney's guideline for handling and storing digital evidence.

6. **Tagger / Tagging Crew Documentation:**

   - Officers receive instruction on how GSF documents taggers and tagging crews.
   - Included in this are the methods by which cases and tagger information are filed.

7. **Partnerships with Prosecutors:**

   - GSF officers build and maintain working partnerships with the appropriate prosecutors to ensure case issuance and prosecution.

GRAFFITI STRIKE FORCE OFFICER ENFORCEMENT MODEL

GSF officers need to be extraordinary officers. The demands of GSF will require a great deal from its officers. GSF officers are expected to be innovative in their attempt to suppress and apprehend taggers. Therefore, there is a basic model for how GSF officers conduct their operations. By no means is this model the only way to achieve success. The amount of success GSF sees will only be limited to the officers' innovation and imagination.

GSF officers proactively seek out, identify, and document graffiti in their areas of responsibility. Through documentation and interpretation of the graffiti, GSF officers identify the trends and habits of taggers and tagging crews. GSF officers identify the moniker, or monikers, used along with their tagging crew or gang.

GSF officers take digital images of the graffiti vandalism then catalogue and archive the photographs in Graffiti Tracker.

GSF officers, or their designee, conduct a records check of the moniker(s) using the various law enforcement computer systems (i.e. Graffiti Tracker, Graffiti Data Base, ARJIS, Cal-Gangs and San Diego City Schools). During their daily duties, GSF officers work diligently to gather street intelligence on ongoing investigations and graffiti vandals. Information is obtained from known taggers and gang members regarding pending cases. Officers strive to identify suspects to make arrests. Once the graffiti vandals have been identified, GSF officers arrest and interview the suspect(s).
(Deleted – records of security)
The suspect is then booked into the appropriate custodial facility. The officer prepares a comprehensive investigative packet for the appropriate prosecuting agency. The packet includes all reports, evidence, damage estimates and information related to the case. The investigative packets are hand carried by the GSF officer to the appropriate prosecuting agency. It is the duty of the officer to follow up with the assigned prosecutor and see the case through to conviction and sentencing. (Due to time restraints, officers have the discretion whether or not to place the suspect into a custodial facility.)

GRAFFITI STRIKE FORCE UNIT STRUCTURE

GSF works as a team. In the recent years, there has been an explosion of violent crimes involving tagging crews and graffiti vandals. There have been several homicides, shootings, and assaults with deadly weapons directly attributed to graffiti vandals. Based on intelligence, some graffiti vandals are carrying weapons and acting more like “gangs” every day. Graffiti vandals often “brag” to one another about how they are going to “cap a cop” one day. Officers should use appropriate contact and cover techniques. In addition, GSF officers will be responsible for their assigned command. Officers will be assigned cases in their areas by the GSF supervisor. This system allows the officers to have an overlapping knowledge base of taggers and tagging crews in their divisions. Each day new tagging crews are formed. Tagging crews put their monikers and crew names on public and private property. Therefore, it is very important for GSF to share and exchange information on all tagging crews and graffiti activity citywide.

Officers are responsible for training and information sharing at their assigned area stations. As time permits, the officers are encouraged to attend lineups at the commands to share information and brief patrol officers on new graffiti trends.

GSF UNIT DESIGNATORS

Detective Sergeant ……1390S
Detective……1396D
Officers……1391 through 1398 are available

The units will operate on the radio frequencies of their areas of responsibility.

The responsibilities of the GSF officer are:

1. **Document and Investigate Graffiti and Graffiti Related Crimes Citywide:**

    - GSF officers proactively investigate graffiti crimes working with the victims in order to conduct follow-ups on leads and conduct witness checks.
    - When necessary, GSF has the discretion to work a flexible schedule to accommodate current crime trends.
    - GSF officers will work closely with Gang Detectives regarding graffiti crimes throughout the city since many taggers also associate with gangs.
    - GSF officers will investigate and follow up on graffiti crimes citywide and in the bordering cities as needed.
    - Under the direction of a GSF detective, GSF officers will prepare investigative packets on arrested suspects.
    - GSF officers will organize special details with the necessary resources and personnel to address identified problems such as stores selling aerosol paint products to minors and not properly securing aerosol paint products in compliance with city municipal codes.

2. **Work with Prosecutors, Probation Officers, Parole Agents and Court Officials to streamline conviction process:**

    - GSF will work closely with selected City and District Attorneys in order to educate and assist them with the prosecution of taggers.
    - GSF officers will be listed as “Graffiti Experts” with both the City Attorney’s Office and the District Attorney’s office to testify as experts in San Diego graffiti cases.
    - GSF will work closely with area station Juvenile Probation Officers in order to follow up on juvenile suspects and their condition of probation.
    - GSF will also work with the Probation/Parole Department in order to conduct routine follow ups on convicted taggers in order to verify that they are in compliance with their probation/parole conditions and other laws.
    - GSF will work with prosecutors to have tagger cases heard in courtrooms where judges have experience hearing graffiti cases in San Diego.
    - GSF will input taggers into the ONS system along with a synopsis of their probation conditions to notify other officers in the field when they are stopped.

3. **Assist San Diego Police Officers and other Law Enforcement Agencies regarding graffiti crimes:**

    - GSF will be a resource in conjunction with Gang Unit detectives for San Diego Police officers and any other agencies requiring assistance regarding graffiti related crimes and/or investigations.
    - For example, GSF will assist divisions interested in addressing specific graffiti problems in their area by setting up special details to target chronic graffiti locations and/or suspects in their area.

4. **Provide ongoing training regarding graffiti crimes and investigations:**

    - GSF will provide periodic training to San Diego Police officers and any other agencies requiring training on graffiti crimes and investigations.
    - Maintain and update the Graffiti Resource Guide as needed.
    - GSF will develop and teach a menu class to officers at the academy.

5. **Attend Community Meetings and provide training to Citizens and Business Owners regarding Graffiti Crimes and Trends.**

    - GSF will coordinate with the various divisions' Community Relations Officers in order to schedule speaking engagements at various San Diego community meetings.

6. **Liaison with Street Gang Unit:**

    - GSF will work with the Street Gang Unit in order to exchange intelligence on suspected taggers or tagging crews.

7. **Facilitate and Evaluate Incoming Tagger Information:**

    - GSF will be responsible for evaluating incoming FI's and reports for potential documentation into the CalGang computer system or the Graffiti Database.
    - GSF will help determine if suspects or tagging crews meet the requirements to be documented as "Tag Bangers."

8. **Respond to Graffiti related crime scenes:**

    - GSF detectives will be available to patrol officers to assist on graffiti related felony crimes scenes where there is a known suspect or suspect in custody for a graffiti related such as 245(a) (1) PC or 594(b) (1) PC. Additionally, the detective will evaluate, for documentation purposes, the identity of tag banging crews.

9. **Prepare any special reports or document:**

    - GSF will prepare any search warrants, arrests warrants, and affidavits as required.

GRAFFITI STRIKE FORCE DAILY OPERATIONS

GSF officers are responsible for graffiti related crimes citywide and are self-sufficient, freeing up patrol officers.

GSF have been assigned department telephones and will be available for call outs or questions during their shift to assist patrol units with taggers in custody.

GSF officers carry out their assigned duties and responsibilities in their assigned areas. GSF are not responsible for routine radio calls for service, but are available on critical incidents and crimes in progress when officers are in the field.

GSF officers provide a monthly statistical report to the detective sergeant along with a schedule of planned operations to include any necessary Tactical Action Plans.

GSF officers are authorized to work in both uniform and plainclothes, depending on their daily schedule.

GSF officers conduct operations requiring a plainclothes function, i.e. to gain valuable intelligence, and monitor taggers from a close proximity at malls, trade shows, and trolley stations. GSF officers in plain clothes wear raid jackets during 4th waiver searches and search warrants. All necessary safety equipment will be worn.

GRAFFITI STRIKE FORCE STATISTICS

The GSF detective sergeant keeps a monthly log of the unit's statistics for feedback, measured effectiveness. The sergeant will evaluate the data on an ongoing basis, making changes as needed.

VEHICLE USE POLICY

GSF detectives are included in the Street Gang Unit callout matrix and are subjected to the same department vehicle use procedures. (See Street Gang Unit Procedural Manuel)

CONCLUSION

By aggressively enforcing graffiti crimes, GSF aims to assist in reducing crime rates and calls for service relating to taggers.

This Operations Manual cannot account for every situation the GSF will encounter and is only as a guideline. This Operations Manual will change as situations and or missions change.


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