

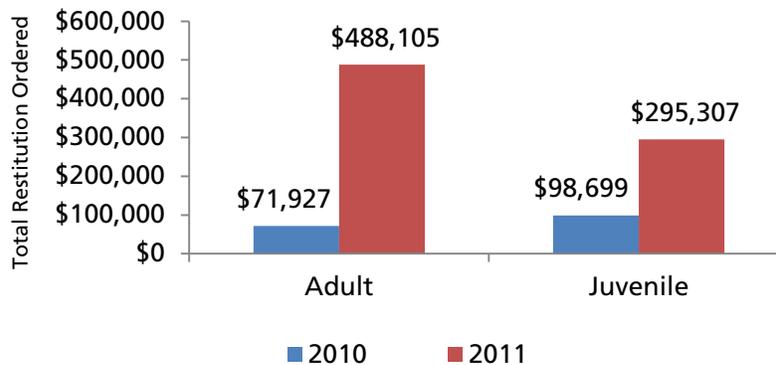
Technology Shows Promise in Recouping Costs Associated with Graffiti

Graffiti may be viewed as a victimless crime, but research suggests that when left unchecked, it can reflect negatively upon a community and threaten residents' safety¹. Whether viewed as an art form or a communication tool among opposing gangs, graffiti exacts a social and economic price and warrants investigation into ways to prevent it.

"I talk about this program at community meetings. The public seems relieved to know the police are actively combatting graffiti in their city with this program". -Pilot project participant

To this end, an 18-month pilot project was launched in San Diego County in January 2011 that utilized technology (*Graffiti Tracker*)² to document graffiti and convict prolific offenders. Agencies participating in the San Diego County Multi-Discipline Graffiti Abatement Program included all local law enforcement agencies, transit agencies, and the Port of San Diego. SANDAG conducted a process and outcome evaluation to document the pilot's effectiveness. Findings from the evaluation revealed that during calendar year 2011, 82,242 graffiti incidents (or 226 per day) were documented in *Graffiti Tracker*. The cost to remove this graffiti hovered around \$16 million, suggesting that a seemingly minor crime can have a significant impact on local budgets. These removal costs could be offset by a considerable increase in restitution ordered in 2011, compared to 2010, for juvenile and adult offenders. This increase demonstrates the practical relevance of *Graffiti Tracker* if locals decide to continue using the system (Figure 1). In fact, 94 percent of *Graffiti Tracker* users said they would recommend the continued use of the system (not shown).

**Figure 1
COURT-ORDERED RESTITUTION IN GRAFFITI CASES SOARED IN 2011**



SOURCE: SANDAG, County of San Diego Auditor and Controller's Office, 2012

The full report provides in-depth analysis about the system's importance for not only strengthening cases for successful prosecution, but also identifying cross-jurisdictional graffiti incidents. To access the report, well as other SANDAG publications, go to www.sandag.org/cj.

¹ Skogan, W. G. (1990). *Disorder and decline: Crime and the spiral of decay in American neighborhoods*. New York: Free Press.
² Wilson, J. Q. and Kelling, G. L. (1982, March). Broken Windows: the police and neighborhood safety. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved April 5, 2012, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/4465/>.
² *Graffiti Tracker* is a Web-based sharing intelligence and analysis service that allows photographs and locations of graffiti incidents to be submitted into a national database.