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## A new tool in cities' graffiti fight

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City and school workers from Pierce and South King counties gathered in front of a retaining wall next to Highway 18 in Auburn last week to plan their fight against a common enemy: graffiti.

They witnessed a demonstration of one of the newest techniques for removing the unwanted messages: a special pressure-washing system.

Buckley maintenance worker Mac McCracken watched as gray paint and two underlying layers of graffiti were removed in 15 minutes, leaving a bare concrete wall.

McCracken liked what he saw. The patented method could remove graffiti from picnic benches in Buckley's skate park, on road signs and on buildings.

"This way here, it will take the tagging off and leave the paint," he said later.

McCracken, who's in charge of parks, cemetery and building maintenance for the city on the plateau, started thinking of other uses for the system, such as cleaning mossy cemetery headstones. And he talked to his boss, who is considering using the system.

Algona police Sgt. Lee Gaskill gathered together about 20 people Thursday to see the graffiti-removal technology, called the Farrow System, put into action.

Gaskill said it's important to remove graffiti quickly and eliminate the incentive for taggers to add to their marks.

Five years old and imported from England, the pressure-washing system uses volcanic crystals and 160-degree water to remove graffiti without harming the underlying surface, said Pete Hall, general manager for Surface Cleaning Technologies.

The crystals, mined in Skagit County, break up the paint so it can be washed away.

Gaskill invited other cities to learn about the technology after he watched it work in Algona.

In three hours last month, one of Hall's workers washed away graffiti, removing every spot on Algona's checklist. Painting it all would have taken more than a day and left ugly patches, Gaskill said.

Algona is contracting with Hall's business to clean up graffiti for 12 months, using a \$3,000 government grant.

Hall's Bellevue firm uses and sells the system in Washington and Oregon. Hall was in the news last summer when he and his company removed paint that was mistakenly used to cover up a mural near Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle.

Hall's company will remove graffiti for cities at a reduced price. He's charging \$2 per square foot cleaned, and he's waiving the usual fee for traveling to a job. Hall said he wants to help cities and get the word out about the system.

Gaskill said he gained no benefit from organizing the demonstration. He just wants others to know about the tool.

Auburn parks maintenance manager Mike Miller watched last week as the graffiti was pressure-washed off the retaining wall in the 800 block of Fifth Street Southeast.

"It works good," Miller said. "I still think it's quicker and cheaper to just paint over it."

But he added that Auburn is considering using the Farrow System.

On Veterans Day, two Auburn parks were targeted with graffiti. An amphitheater wall in Game Farm Park and the concrete floor of the skate park in Sunset Park were tagged. Miller's workers were out the next day painting over the graffiti.

"We try to get it off as quick as we can and that seems to help quite a bit," Miller said. "It takes away from what the graffiti artist is trying to do."

One of Miller's reservations is the cost of buying equipment to use the Farrow System.

Federal Way paid \$50,097 for one of the machines and has been using it for two months.

The equipment doesn't save time, but it does help the city look better, said community development director Greg Fewins.

Before, Federal Way would paint over graffiti with whatever color of paint it could get for free, Fewins said.

Now, the city can return most graffiti-covered surfaces back to their original condition without using paint.

And that's made a big difference in how neighborhoods look, he said.

For additional information about the Farrow System for removing graffiti, call Surface Cleaning Technologies at 206-767-1800 or visit [www.sctclean.com](http://www.sctclean.com).

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