

Greens MP Sue Pennicuk has defended some spray can vandalism as "aesthetically pleasing and thought-provoking". A paint removal expert reveals he has 14,000 customers who disagree

# The frontline in war on graffiti

Mary Bolling and Shannon McRae

TAKE it from Rod Mackenzie: there's nothing aesthetically pleasing about the millions of dollars of damage caused by graffiti every year.

The founder of clean-up company Graffiti Eaters said tough new anti-graffiti laws passed by State Parliament yesterday were desperately needed to fight the problem.

Mr Mackenzie, who founded the business 30 years ago, and his team now have 14,000 clients.

They clear up more than 100 homes and public sites every week.

Mr Mackenzie said nearly all of Melbourne's graffiti attacks were mindless tagging, and graffiti hot spots regularly attracted other criminal activity. Parliament by Greens MP Sue Pennicuk, Mr Mackenzie said many people had the wrong perception of the tough new laws.

"These laws aren't about putting 15-year-olds in jail. They're about targeting repeat offenders who are doing hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage," he said.

Mr Mackenzie said his company had seen graffiti vandals who paid thousands of dollars for expensive abseiling and spray paint equipment to use in their destructive missions.

"We've had 21 or 22-year-olds... who have done graffiti in the city where the only way they could have done it was abseiling," he said.

"The cost of removing that sort of thing is probably \$3000... and unless they knock the building down, it's going to have to come down eventually."

Graffiti Eaters had seen a 30 per cent jump in business in September and October, Mr Mackenzie said.

The new laws - which will allow police to search anyone on public transport, including minors, who are suspected of carrying spray cans - passed without amendment in State Parliament's Upper House yesterday.

Ms Pennicuk unsuccessfully argued against clauses in the anti-graffiti Bill that



Cleaning up: Mark Worsley, of Graffiti Eaters, goes to work. Picture: JAY TOWN

shift the burden of proof from the police or prosecution to the accused.

Suspects will have to prove they were not intending to use spray cans for graffiti, rather than police having to prove they were.

Ms Pennicuk said there was no other offence where a person's guilt was assumed unless they prove otherwise.

Planning Minister Justin Madden, speaking in favour of the Bill, said the hard-line approach was necessary to bring down vandals.

Many councils have also supported the tough laws.

A Herald Sun survey of 20 councils showed that rates paid for a collective graffiti clean-up total of more than \$3 million last year.

Connex is also hard-hit: graffiti vandals cost it \$11 million a year in train damage and delays.

## How much we have spent in the past year on cleaning up graffiti:

Municipality	2006-07
Bayside	\$123,000
Boroondara	\$312,000
Casey	\$199,000
Glen Eira	\$160,000
Hobsons Bay	\$100,000
Hume	\$134,000
Kingston	\$103,983
Maribyrnong	\$112,000
Melbourne	\$500,000
Monash	\$130,000
Moreland	\$100,000
Port Phillip	\$275,000
Stonnington	\$225,000
Whitehorse	\$160,000
Whittlesea	\$300,000
Wyndham	\$300,000
Yarra	\$125,000

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## Paint and drug counts

A MAN has faced court over graffiti and drugs charges.

Simon Nelsen, 25, of Surrey Hills appeared at Melbourne Magistrates' Court yesterday on six charges.

He is accused of trafficking diacetylmorphine, also known as heroin, possessing diacetylmorphine and cannabis, dealing with \$2278 suspected of being proceeds of crime, and possessing a spray paint can.

Mr Nelsen's arrest on Wednesday followed a police search of a house and car.

Lawyer Alex Wilson told the court her client was on medication for depression and would apply for bail today.

Magistrate Felicity Broughton remanded Mr Nelsen to reappear today.

