

City of Philadelphia
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL



POLICY RECOMMENDATION REPORT
The Anti-Graffiti Network

October 4, 2013

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I. Introduction

At the request of the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an investigation of five employees in the Anti-Graffiti Network, a unit focused on removing graffiti from community streets and buildings throughout Philadelphia. The OIG investigation sustained multiple allegations of theft of time, theft of supplies, falsification of official documents and misuse of City resources by all five employees, resulting in their eventual separation from City employment. Although the investigation was initially focused on discrete acts of misconduct, it revealed significant and concerning issues regarding the program’s operation and exposed a widespread culture of theft, fraud and abuse within the Anti-Graffiti Network. Accordingly, the OIG expanded its evaluation to examine and address the day-to-day operations of the unit as a whole.

This report substantiates the need for targeted new procedures within the Anti-Graffiti Network, designed to improve accountability, increase efficiency and assist the program in its mission of service to the communities of Philadelphia. Part II of this report describes the basic composition of the Anti-Graffiti Network, their mission and the manner in which they assign work and issue supplies. Part III presents the details of the OIG investigation, which ultimately resulted in the resignation or termination of five employees. Part IV describes several systemic issues raised by the investigation, including: (i) a severe lack of supervision and oversight; (ii) an ineffective work assignment system that was easily abused; and (iii) a flawed supply management system that permitted repeated theft. Part V sets forth the OIG’s recommendations to correct these issues, including: (i) more vigilant oversight and supervisory accountability; (ii) increased division of responsibility; (iii) strict review and monitoring of supply requests and use; and (iv) a large-scale evaluation of the program.

II. Background: The Anti-Graffiti Network

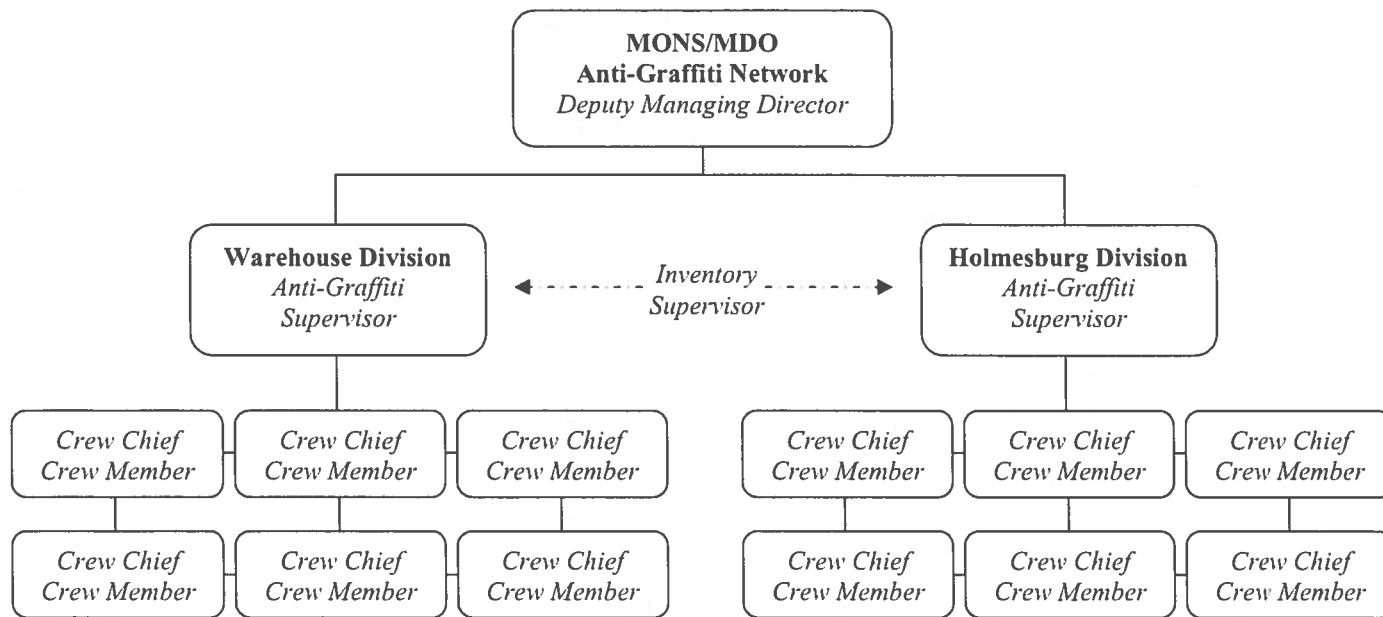
The Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services (MONS), a division of the Managing Director’s Office, is dedicated to improving the quality of life within diverse communities across the City. With an annual budget of approximately \$4.8 million, MONS is composed of four distinct programs, each with a different targeted mission: the Anti-Graffiti Network; the Vacant Lot Program; the Community Partnership Program; and the Camera Surveillance Program. The Anti-Graffiti Network is tasked with community beautification, removing unsightly graffiti, posters, flyers and other clutter from various City streets and buildings.

1. Organizational Structure & Personnel

The Anti-Graffiti Network maintains facilities at two central locations: 4000 American Street (known as “the warehouse”) and 8289 Torresdale Avenue (known as “Holmesburg”). Each location has a staff of approximately twenty City employees, with one Anti-Graffiti Supervisor assigned at each division to oversee the day-to-day operations. An Inventory Supervisor manages the supplies at both locations and divides his time between the warehouse and Holmesburg. Within each division, work is performed by approximately ten crews of two City employees: a Crew Chief and a Crew Member. Each crew has an assigned City vehicle to travel within their assigned areas of the City. The Crew Chiefs operate the cars and supervise the graffiti-removal when the crews are in the field.

The following organizational chart illustrates the supervisory structure and relevant personnel within the Anti-Graffiti Network:

Anti-Graffiti Network: Organizational Chart



2. Work Assignment & Completion

Each crew has an assigned zip-code or mapped area to cover during the day. After arriving at the central location, the crews disburse in City vehicles, looking for instances of graffiti to remove within their assigned area of the City. Occasionally, the Anti-Graffiti Network will be notified of a specific graffiti-removal job through 311, and the Anti-Graffiti Supervisors will then assign this work to a given crew. But most of the time, the Anti-Graffiti Network Supervisors do not instruct the crews to complete specific or identified projects during the day. Rather, the crews simply drive around in their assigned zip-codes looking for graffiti to remove. Given the significant amount of graffiti in these areas of the City, it is assumed that the crews will have sufficient work to complete in order to occupy full workdays.

At the beginning of the day, the crews are provided with blank “work order” forms, on which they are supposed to record all of the projects that they completed that day and the supplies that they used to do so. At the end of the day, these forms are turned-in to the Anti-Graffiti Supervisors, who are required to review them. But, the Supervisors do not visit the listed locations to ensure that the graffiti-removal reported on the forms was actually completed.

3. Supply Requests & Documentation

In order to successfully remove graffiti, employees must use a variety of supplies, including: paint, brushes, rollers, “taginator” (a powerful bleaching agent) and other commercial cleaning products. Both central locations, the warehouse and Holmesburg, maintain an inventory of these supplies for use by the crews. Every day, employees can obtain supplies by submitting written requests to the roving Inventory Supervisor.

Unfortunately, prior to this investigation, there was no mechanism in place to monitor the use of supplies. Although employees were required to submit written request forms, there were no amount limits or other regulations regarding the use of supplies. Rather, any employee could obtain a virtually unlimited quantity of supplies because requests were granted without scrutiny. And, even though the crews were required to document the supplies that they used to complete their work during the day, neither the Inventory Supervisor nor the Anti-Graffiti Supervisors checked the documented work against the supply requisition forms to ensure that the proper supplies were used on the proper job.

III. OIG Investigation

In October 2012, a new Inventory Supervisor was assigned to the Anti-Graffiti Network. Immediately, he noticed that several crews were using an excessive amount of supplies, including chemical cleaning agents and paint. He continued to grant these supply requests but closely monitored certain crews. The pattern continued through the spring of 2013. Eventually, the Inventory Supervisor brought the matter to the attention of the Deputy Managing Director, who contacted the Office of the Inspector General on May 2, 2013. The subsequent OIG investigation confirmed a widespread theft of time and supplies at the Anti-Graffiti warehouse.

The OIG examined all of the available inventory request forms and cross-referenced them with the corresponding work orders submitted by the crews in question. This cross-check revealed significant inconsistencies. First, the subject crews ordered a disproportionate amount of paint and supplies when compared with the graffiti-removal projects reported on the work orders. Second, the crews were using excessive amounts of paint that did not match the color or type that would have been used on the reported project. Furthermore, the work orders showed many repeat locations, and the crews reported that they had removed the same graffiti at the same location several times in a single week.

OIG investigators also conducted in-person and electronic GPS surveillance of the Anti-Graffiti crews during the workday. On several occasions, the crews were seen playing basketball for hours at the end of the day. And, GPS records confirmed that the crews were regularly taking their City vehicles outside of their assigned zip-codes, where they were required to identify and remove graffiti.

The OIG then interviewed four Crew Members, one Crew Chief, the Inventory Supervisor and the Anti-Graffiti Supervisor assigned to the warehouse. The Crew Members and the Crew Chief all voluntarily admitted to significant misconduct and collectively painted a picture of a system riddled with theft, fraud and abuse. They told OIG investigators that they rarely worked a full day and often played basketball or other sports for several hours to fill time while in the field. One employee also confessed to the chronic use of illegal narcotics while on duty. The employees also admitted to falsifying documentation on a regular basis, including work orders and supply requisition forms. The wrongdoing extended to the use of City vehicles, as a Crew Chief admitted to using the vehicle to drive his child to-and-from school on a daily basis, outside of his assigned work area and in violation of the City's vehicle use policy.

And, several Crew Members confirmed that they would frequently request a large amount of paint and other supplies that they had no intention of using to remove graffiti. Instead, they would then sell the supplies on the open-market for private gain. Each five-gallon can of paint cost the City approximately \$60 and could generally fetch approximately \$25 on the street. Through this scheme, the employees potentially earned thousands of dollars over time, while the City incurred an even greater loss.

Following the OIG investigation and the employees' troubling admissions, three of the five employees voluntarily resigned and two were involuntarily terminated for their actions. Through a separate memorandum, the OIG also recommended discipline for selected supervisors who failed to demonstrate the appropriate level of leadership.

IV. Issues

The OIG investigation revealed a number of extremely concerning issues within the Anti-Graffiti Network. Most importantly, there was a pervasive lack of supervision and oversight at the warehouse that permitted significant delinquency and detracted from the Anti-Graffiti Network's overall mission of community service. This lack of oversight was coupled with an ineffective work assignment system and a flawed supply management procedure that ultimately contributed to a widespread culture of theft, fraud and abuse.

1. Lack of Supervision & Oversight

The OIG commends the newly assigned Inventory Supervisor for flagging potential wrongdoing and bringing it to the attention of his superiors. His vigilance and commitment are a testament to his personal character and the City's ongoing pledge to honesty and integrity in all phases of local government.

That said, however, the misconduct within the Anti-Graffiti Network went unfettered for years prior to his arrival, and the Inventory Supervisor was not the only person tasked with oversight. Prior to this investigation, the lack of supervision within the Anti-Graffiti Network as a whole was staggering. Understanding that their work requires employees to be away from supervision and in the field for long periods of time, there was still little effort to protect the integrity and the mission of the program.

A considerable portion of the crews were left free to defraud the City and misuse resources for the majority of the workday. With no oversight and no systems in place to establish accountability, the crew members' pattern of abuse could, and did, go unchecked. What likely began as occasional and slight violations, probably expanded over time into a widespread problem that occurred daily.

2. Ineffective Work Assignment System

Closely related to the lack of supervision, the Anti-Graffiti Network has no effective system to assign relevant work to the crews. The employees were given blank "work order" forms and then sent out to identify and remove graffiti. Then, when the work forms were submitted to supervision at the end of the day, there was no attempt to verify that any of the reported graffiti-removal was actually completed.

This work assignment procedure permits obvious abuse because it allows the employee to assign his or her own tasks. Unmotivated crew members could easily falsify these forms, generate phony jobs and repeat graffiti-removal locations without any repercussions, leaving them free throughout the day to engage in recreational activities or personal errands. This, in fact, occurred at least as early as October 2012, and likely well before the new Inventory Supervisor's arrival.

3. *Flawed Supply Management*

The current method of supply management is also highly vulnerable to fraud and in need of serious reform. Although the crew members are required to submit written requests for paint, tools and chemical cleaning agents, there is no standard by which the requests are evaluated. For the most part, supplies are freely issued without any justification.

Eventually, once the theft became abundant, the new Inventory Supervisor noticed a huge amount of supply requests and began to monitor crew activity. But, with a more stringent supply management policy, he and his predecessor simply could have denied these requests if they were not justified by the crews' workload. Moreover, nobody at the warehouse ever checked the requisition forms against the reported graffiti-removal work. It seems clear that the supplies requested should correspond to a particular project, to ensure that the appropriate supplies are actually used to accomplish authorized work for the communities served by the Anti-Graffiti Network.

V. Recommendations

Each of the recommendations below has been crafted to improve the issues addressed above and assist the Anti-Graffiti Network in carrying out their mission. While the OIG understands that new procedures may require additional time and effort, this investigation has shown that the Anti-Graffiti Network has ample opportunity to invest in additional process. This investigation has established that employees did not work a full day and could easily be tasked with additional duties.

We recommend: (i) more vigilant oversight and strengthened supervisory accountability; (ii) better division of responsibility, particularly as it relates to the work assignment system; (iii) strict review and monitoring of supply requests and use; and (iv) a large-scale evaluation of the program. As always, the OIG has worked closely with the Anti-Graffiti Network to design these improvements, and many of these changes are already underway.

1. *Vigilant Oversight & Supervisory Accountability*

Most importantly, the work of the Anti-Graffiti Network must be better supervised, from top-down, to prevent the misconduct and abuse that was uncovered by this investigation. Some of the supervisory failures that contributed to the culture at the warehouse were directly attributable to ineffective process and procedures. But, generally speaking, all levels of supervisors must be more vigilant in their oversight of the employees. Ultimately, it is the supervisors' responsibility to ensure that the mission of the Anti-Graffiti Network is being carried out effectively and targeted to the needs of the community.

One way to increase supervisory accountability can include additional and periodic reporting to the Managing Director's Office. Anti-Graffiti Supervisors should have to keep detailed records about the work that their crews are performing in the field, and they should continually report improvements that they have made within the communities of Philadelphia. And, the supervisors must be more vigilant during the workday. They should closely monitor the locations of the crews throughout the day, either in-person, through closed-circuit security cameras at inventory storage locations, or with the use of GPS live-vehicle-tracking where available.

2. *Increased Division of Responsibility & Segmented Work Assignment*

Currently, the graffiti-removal projects are assigned, completed and checked by the same individuals. This practice makes little sense and must stop. It allows shiftless and inactive crews to evade work requirements and engage in unauthorized activities on City time. Ideally, to prevent abuse, these different work tasks should be divided among distinct groups and reviewed by different supervisors. Depending on the needs of the program, this can be done in a variety of ways.

First, we recommend dividing the graffiti-spotting and graffiti-removal between crews. This task division will lessen the opportunity for unchecked falsification of work order forms. On some occasions, specific crews can spend time surveying assigned areas and identifying specific graffiti that should be removed. Then, other crews can receive this information and go out with targeted graffiti-removal projects and identifiable goals for the work week. This division of responsibility can be done on a rotational basis, and it will better protect the integrity of the program's efforts.

Second, supervision should be a part of all tasks, including the graffiti-spotting. The supervisors must engage in active dialogue with the community to identify specific areas that might require work, and they should frequently spend time in the field scoping out problem locations. And, once the crews report completed graffiti-removal, supervisors should actively visit some of the reported locations to ensure that the work was actually completed to appropriate quality standards.

3. *Strict Review of Supply Requests & Supply Use*

There must be additional procedures to prevent the unrestricted manner in which supplies are requested and used on the job. Since this investigation, the Anti-Graffiti Network has implemented a "one-for-one" system, requiring employees to furnish empty paint cans and/or used tools in order to receive matching new supplies. Certainly, this system is an improvement over the prior method, but there should be added checks in place to deter theft and increase efficiency.

We recommend closed-circuit video surveillance and required cross-checking of the inventory forms against the corresponding work order forms. On a periodic basis, perhaps weekly, supervisors can compare the amount and type of supplies that were requested with the specific graffiti-removal projects. In this way, inconsistencies can more easily be identified and City resources will be better protected.

4. *Program Evaluation*

Lastly, the issues uncovered through this investigation have raised an important question about the overall effectiveness of the Anti-Graffiti Network on the whole. Significant funds and City resources are devoted to a program that is intended to serve the diverse communities of Philadelphia, but we must protect this investment for the public good. Otherwise, the Network's articulated mission and the City's efforts to improve the quality of life for all Philadelphians are seriously undermined and highly vulnerable to criticism.

For this reason, the OIG recommends a large-scale program evaluation of the Anti-Graffiti Network and its effect on the communities it serves. Those in charge of the Network should scrutinize the program's efficiency and measurable results over the past several years. As it is now, the policy aim of the program is at odds with the Network's operational reality. The Anti-Graffiti Network is about community improvement and

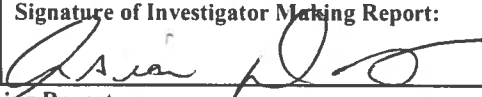
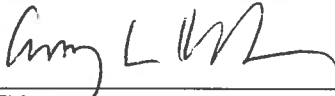
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beautification across Philadelphia, far more than just washing walls. If the City is going to commit time, effort and resources to this unit, its focus should be broader than graffiti removal alone.

As its name suggests, the Anti-Graffiti Network should be actively working to build a core awareness of a public problem and increase civic participation to combat it. To this end, the Network should be focused on community engagement in some way, in addition to its current narrow function. Supervisors, Managers and Crew Members can meet with influential community members, recreational groups, local businesses and other community stakeholders to initiate a public dialogue about beautification and identify potential projects to complete together. And, the projects should not be limited to simple paint jobs. Rather, the Network can take advantage of available and considerable City resources that can support larger undertakings, like community gardens or playgrounds. With a broader and more long-term view of its mission, the Anti-Graffiti Network can be far more effective, have a more direct impact on the quality of life within the City and better allocate resources to accomplish important policy goals.

VI. Conclusion

In sum, the lack of supervision and ineffective procedures have severely compromised the mission of the Anti-Graffiti Network and resulted in significant losses to the City of Philadelphia. This report has identified a number of distinct issues and set forth some potential solutions. To date, many of our recommendations have already been implemented, and we are confident that these issues will continue to get the attention that they deserve.

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