

## Zero Tolerance Effort Renewed



### MTA Reviving Division Advisory Committees; Training Employees to Work with Communities

By Bill Heard, Editor

(Dec. 20) With graffiti cleanup on Metro Buses costing \$10 million to \$13 million annually - enough to buy 50 to 60 CNG buses - the MTA is reviving an important element of its Zero Tolerance program: the Division Advisory Committee (DAC).

Zero Tolerance, launched in 1991, is a three-pronged program that emphasizes aggressive maintenance and cleaning of graffiti-scarred buses, law enforcement attention and a strong community outreach program to schools and community organizations. That outreach is accomplished by DAC volunteers.

#### Divisions 1, 3, 5 organized

Currently, DACs have been organized at divisions 1, 3 and 5. Divisions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 15 are targeted next. DAC volunteers are "frontline" employees whose ranks include bus operators and maintenance personnel. They receive training in skills, such as marketing, public affairs and public speaking, that are useful in a community outreach program.

"Our goal by the end of FY 2000 is to organize DACs at all 11 bus divisions, with perhaps 175 volunteers," says Bill Gay, a senior communications officer in Transit Operations and DAC coordinator. "We've been getting excellent reception from rank-and-file employees."

Gay expects some 100 DAC volunteers from divisions 1, 3, 5 and 10 to attend training sessions at 9 a.m., Saturday, Jan. 8. Two, six-hour sessions will be conducted in the Windsor Room, 15th floor, on public speaking and other skills.

#### DAC is important component

Tom Conner, executive officer, Transit Operations, agrees that community outreach by DAC volunteers is "an important component in the overall effort to reach Zero Tolerance."

Conner says law enforcement efforts are paying off with the arrest by LAPD and Sheriff's deputies of an increasing number of vandals. LAPD officers recently arrested and charged eight vandals in one day.

The MTA also is attempting to engineer buses to make graffiti prevention and removal more effective and efficient, he says. This includes switching to use of velcro-backed seat inserts that can be removed and replaced quickly and using easier-to-clean plastic seats in the back of the bus.

#### Vandals turned to internal graffiti

In its earlier Zero Tolerance effort, when the MTA virtually eliminated external graffiti on its buses, vandals began marking seats and etching windows. The cost of replacing the 20 to 24 passenger windows typically runs \$6,400. The MTA Board has just authorized \$2.5 million for the purchase of 389 bus window kit assemblies.



"Spending money for graffiti cleanup is a wasted resource," Gary Spivack, director, Operations Support Services, says.

"Every time some kid defaces a window, it reaches into your pocket as either a bus patron or a taxpayer."

Through the revitalization of the DAC program, the MTA hopes to reach the people who can restore pride in the bus system as an integral part of the community and who can influence the next generation to treat the mass transit system as a valuable community resource.

### **Mission has three elements**

The three elements of the DAC mission are school outreach and education, community clean-ups and parent education.

By sending DAC volunteers into the schools, the MTA hopes to reach impressionable children with messages on self-esteem, personal responsibility and respect and ownership of public property.

DAC members also work with schools, community groups and businesses to hold community clean-ups. Many DAC volunteers spend dozens of personal hours on such projects.

### **Identifying anti-social signs**

At Parent Education Seminars, DAC members provide information on how to identify anti-social signs in children's behavior and appearance. The seminars stress the importance of parent-child communications and teaching kids personal responsibility.

Throughout all these efforts, the costs of graffiti vandalism, including the legal and financial costs to the vandals and their families, is highlighted.

"There has been a groundswell of support," says DAC Coordinator Gay. "A lot of our employees, who already have skills like public speaking, want to get involved. We're empowering our employees to help us develop strategies to go out in the community, work with the residents and mitigate issues."

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