

Deputies Charge Suspects in 100-Plus Graffiti Incidents

- **\$175,000 Damage**

(Dec. 3, 2003) Sheriff's deputies have filed charges against three teenagers suspected of causing more than \$175,000 in graffiti vandalism damage to Metro Buses and bus stops in downtown Los Angeles, the South Bay and the San Fernando Valley.



Similar to graffiti on items seized from a suspect's home, most of the damage to buses and bus stops was done with acrylic paints, etching tools, slap-on labels and, sometimes, acid wash.

Deputies from the Transit Services Bureau's Special Problems Unit expect to arrest a fourth teenager, Thursday. The 16-year-old South Los Angeles boy is suspected in 10 vandalism incidents with total damages estimated at \$8,800.

Already in custody are a 16-year-old Highland Park boy believed responsible for 109 vandalism incidents and \$130,000 in damages; a 15-year-old South Los Angeles boy linked to 36 incidents and \$36,000 in damages; and an 18-year-old San Fernando Valley male suspected of doing \$8,000 worth of damage.

The vandalism primarily involved damage to seats and windows on buses from Central City Division 1, Arthur Winston Division 5, North Los Angeles Division 3 and Gateway Division 10, but also included bus benches and shelters throughout the area.

Most of the graffiti was done with acrylic paints, etching tools, slap-on labels and, sometimes, acid wash, according to Sheriff's Lt. Mike Herek, who heads law enforcement for bus operations on the east side of the MTA's service area.

Lengthy investigation

The suspects were identified during a lengthy investigation that peaked during the transit strike when deputies combed idle buses for taggers' monikers and looked for vandals' behavior patterns. The investigation next moved to bus stops and then to area schools.

"The deputies talked to school janitors, administrators and school police and asked if they recognized the tags," says Herek. "They know who the taggers are."

If found guilty of vandalism, the suspects could be jailed, fined, or be sentenced to perform community service – often cleaning up graffiti on Metro Buses or at bus stops. Their parents also could be required to pay damages compensation to MTA.

"Graffiti is the MTA's biggest law enforcement priority," says Herek, "and that makes it our biggest priority."

Special Problems Unit deputies involved in the graffiti investigation were Larry Ware, David Hernandez, Mike Shaw, Kiley Hayden, Matt Haire, Mike Rivas.

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