

Environment

# Taggers on back foot in the city

By Veronica Johnston

A poster advertising agency has stumbled upon a new solution to urban tagging.

The agency, 0800 Phantom, places large street posters promoting music, arts, and street culture on shop walls and public spaces around Auckland.

"Street posters are vital to portray the artistic, social and cultural life of a community," says Christchurch Arts Festival director Guy Boyce.

The posters also cover and prevent tags by taking away the empty white spaces that taggers crave.

But Auckland graffiti artist Johnny Wartman says the posters are no more attractive than tags.

"It's still not really solving the problem — it's just moving it somewhere else," he says.

**"Removal just doesn't stop it. The taggers just keep coming back."**

An Auckland dairy owner, who did not want to be named, is delighted that the new posters displayed recently outside his dairy have stopped tagging. He says Auckland City Council had to come and paint over fresh tags on his shop front once or twice a week.

"Removal just doesn't stop it," he said earlier this year. "The taggers just keep coming back."

Auckland Chamber of Commerce chief executive Michael Barnett is calling for

more money to be spent on stamping out graffiti in the city. He suggests the \$5 million the council is spending on its billboard bylaws should go towards removing graffiti instead.

"These [billboards] are few in number compared with the huge amount of graffiti that daubs the city. Where is the zeal and campaign on this?"

Council graffiti prevention officer Rob Shields is leading the campaign against tagging. He says painting over tagging within 48 hours of it being reported is the best option.

The council has removed graffiti from more than 95,000 sites since 2000.

Manukau City Council spends \$1.5 million per year to clean up after taggers' deforming art and property.

Melbourne University criminologist Mark Halsey recently concluded that rapid paint removal programmes do not reduce tagging.

In 2002, he interviewed 44 graffiti artists who had done "a bit of tagging" in Australia. The artists responded that they returned to the same area to spite authorities.

Halsey promotes the use of "legal walls" within school grounds and communities instead. "Legal walls" are designated walls or areas for exclusive use by graffiti artists.

"There is a high probability that legal walls and other initiatives will help reduce the amount of illegal writing," he says.

There tends to be a "mutual respect from the taggers not to deform graffiti art," according to the Christchurch City Council.

Wartman says "legal walls"



PHOTO: VERONICA JOHNSTON

FROM DESOLATE TO DESIRABLE: Graffiti artist Daniel Tippett's mural at Kingsland train station.

deter tagging because they provide the creative space for graffiti artists to practice and improve their art.

The Eden Albert Community Board recently paid graffiti artist Daniel Tippett \$35,000 to brighten up a legal wall outside Kingsland station.

The community board wanted a mural to stop vandals tagging a white station wall. But after seeing teens tagging another white space among the steps, they decided to have that space paint-

ed too. Legal walls may be the answer but they are also expensive.

But then so is Tony Bicknell's new anti-tagging invention that uses sprinklers and security lights to deter taggers. The sensors trigger walls of water that wash paint away within seconds.

Napier business owner Neville Rapley has installed Bicknell's system and says he hasn't had any taggers since.

But Wartman says Bicknell's wall flooding system will not

work on every wall. He says it is better to hide your property walls and fences behind plants, shrubs or hedges.

Bicknell's new system costs \$300 per metre including installation.

Phantom manager Jamey Holloway says A3 size posters can cost up to \$100 per hundred to produce.

Hiding your walls behind a poster or tree may be the cheapest and most effective tagging solution after all.

## Sea containers pose threat to biosecurity

By Stacey Hunt

The increasing number of sea containers coming into New Zealand is putting pressure on the country's biosecurity systems and putting the environment at risk.

Dr Carolyn Whyte, team leader biosecurity monitoring group for MAF, says sea containers have been linked to the movement of a variety of pests and diseases around the world.

A MAF review shows the number of containers landing in the country increased by about 180 per cent between 1991 and 2003.

It has been suggested they are the most likely way in which the painted apple moth, southern salt marsh mosquito and the var-roa bee mite entered New Zealand.

"There's a risk to human health and to animals."

Dr Whyte says over the past

few years MAF have changed how they manage sea containers and put different processes into place.

"We have also worked with customs to put in place electronic reporting so that we know risks in advance and can conduct risk screening earlier," she says.

"Internationally New Zealand is regarded as having some of the strongest biosecurity control in the world."



PHOTO: STACEY HUNT

WILDLIFE RISK: Pests on board.

## Shops ditch plastic bags

By Anna Burns-Francis

What do San Francisco, Manitoba and Zanzibar have in common with giant retailers Bunnings and Ikea? They've abandoned plastic shopping bags permanently.

The lightweight bags are becoming the target of environmentalists and local authorities worldwide as landfills fill with bags that won't break down for at least 30 years.

New Zealanders use around one billion bags per year.

On May 1, Bunnings New Zealand began charging 10c a bag, with all proceeds going to the Keep New Zealand Beautiful organisation.

By 2008 it will stop supplying them altogether, though it will make sure reusable bags can still be bought, and left-over cardboard boxes are available.

Barry Lucinsky, chief execu-

tive officer of Keep New Zealand Beautiful, says he hopes all retailers will be bag-free in the future, but campaigners have to be patient.

"They're bag organisations. You have to have common sense about it," he says.

Keep New Zealand Beautiful has worked with a plastics manufacturer to come up with a shopping bag that can break down within three months, thanks to a chemical compound added during manufacturing.

Once they reach the tip, they will begin to disintegrate 120 times faster than a normal bag, allowing the rubbish inside to be released and begin degrading.

However Nicola Basham, leader of environmental group Golden Bay Bag Ladies, says adding chemicals to assist in bag breakdown is no better than the current situation.

"Plastic is not the way of the future. We are hoodwinked by the plastics industry into think-

ing we need these things." Both Basham and Lucinsky believe there will always be people who will want to use plastic bags, and they should have to pay for that privilege.

Discount supermarket chain Pak 'n Save has always charged 10c for bags, but only in the North Island.

Andrew MacKenzie, Pak 'n Save's national operations manager, says there is nothing stopping other supermarkets from charging for bags, other than a fear of losing sales.

However Melissa Hodd, executive manager of Foodstuffs New Zealand, which owns Pak 'n Save and New World, says it is not a fair comparison, as Pak 'n Save has always been a value-driven supermarket.

She says there are no plans for New World supermarkets to start charging.

"That would upset customers, [but] we encourage customers to say no to bags."