

When it comes to keeping your business environment a graffiti-free zone help is at hand, reports Carinya Sharples

Anti-tag team

There can be few things more irritating than arriving at work to find fresh graffiti on the walls, doors or shutters of your premises. Recognising the nature and scale of this problem, Lewisham Council is offering specialised training to help small businesses in the borough tackle the problem themselves.

While council teams will remove all tags and graffiti (providing they are notified), the timescales involved may mean that most businesses would prefer to have a trained member of staff clean it up that morning rather than having to wait.

The training is straightforward – taking little more than 20 minutes – and businesses are also supplied with the necessary solutions to clean up the graffiti.

A significant part of the training session involves guidance on how to use these chemicals safely, since they can cause skin irritation if handled incorrectly.

Colin Sandford, Lewisham Council's Environmental Projects Officer, estimates that between 30 and 40 businesses a year receive the training, which was launched in

October 2004. And as more businesses hear about the scheme, Colin is receiving more and more calls for assistance. "In just the past two weeks, I've had six businesses requesting training," he says.

Kathy Gasson, a member of FUSS (Friends and Users of Staplehurst Road Shops) in Hither Green, was one of those who heard about the training early on. Acting as a representative for shopkeepers, she found many were keen to take advantage of the service, and so gave Colin a call.

"The team was fantastic!" enthuses Cathy. "The training only took about 20–30 minutes and we were given graffiti-cleaning solutions for the shops to use. The training told us exactly what to do and – importantly – how to do it safely. And we put it to use last Christmas [2004] on a clean-up day."

She also notes one of the clear benefits of cleaning up graffiti – that a tag-free environment often stays tag-free. "Since the clean-up, the graffiti has been few and far between," she says. "Taggers seem to be discouraged when there's less around."

Launch hour

The 2006 Mayor's Business Awards were officially launched in fine style as Steve Bullock, Mayor of Lewisham, donned an apron and served customers at the Irie Jamaican Café, which won 2005's Best New Business award, in New Cross Gate. The Mayor was joined by past winners (from left to right) Donovan McGowan, Hyacinth Bailey and Janet McGowan of the Irie Jamaican Café; Geraldine Cox owner of Kirkdale Bookshop & Gallery (Best Customer Service); and RL Hair & Beauty Studio's Lora Delmaestro and Razzana Pbrozzi (Best Business in New Cross).

The 10 categories for 2006 Awards are currently being judged. All the winners – plus, the top award of Company of the Year, which is selected from the category winners – will be announced at the Business Awards Ceremony at Blackheath Halls on 22 March. The evening will be hosted by the well-known local comedian and DJ Angle Le Mar and is set to be a great night out celebrating business in the borough. Hope to see you there!



If your business would like help fighting graffiti or needs further information, please contact Colin Sandford on 020 8314 2295 or email colin.sandford@lewisham.gov.uk.