

NO LIGHT AT NIGHT: NIGHT TIME BLACK OUTS AND VANDALISM

Battle Ground School District in Clark County has reduced vandalism to almost zero with a policy to darken campus after 10:30 p.m. Spokane School District and Riverside School District have been experiencing similar results for over six years.

Is it possible to save energy and cut crime at the same time? According to school district experience, vandalism has been cut by simply turning off the lights. Sound preposterous? Experience shows that contrary to conventional law enforcement theory, which stresses well-lit areas, many districts had less vandalism once they've instituted a dark campus policy to save energy dollars. This is significant when you consider how much vandalism costs schools.

In 1980, California public schools lost approximately 13 million dollars from vandalism related acts during non-school hours, according to statistics collected by the State Department of Education.

One of the first school districts to reason that vandals get no thrill out of working in the dark was the San Antonio School District in Texas. In 1973 they started a night time black out program at 19 schools. Sam Wolf, Director of Security for the district says, "I remember as a kid, we never hung around in the dark. We hung around a street light or some other kind of illumination. We wanted to see who was with us. With vandalism, the thrill is seeing the windows broken, in seeing the words written on the wall. It is no thrill to hang around in the dark".

Vandalism damage in the district was reduced from \$160,000 in the late 1960's to \$41,000 per year. Also, "We saved so much on utilities that our business managers and everybody else were quite impressed," says Wolf.

CALIFORNIA RESULTS

Bill Bakers, retired Associate Superintendent for the East Side Union High School District in San Jose, who pioneered an energy savings program that has saved over a million dollars per year, reports:

"We are not aware of any school districts where blacking-out campus coincided with an increase in vandalism, burglary, or arson. There has not been an increase of such incidents in our district during the hours of total blackness. It seems logical that a blackout discourages youth from entering campuses -- they have as much fear of the unknown as anyone else. In case of burglars, any light shown on a campus is cause for suspicion on the part of neighbors and police."

Don Rodriguez, former Energy Manager for Cupertino Union School District reported that vandalism decreased an additional 29% or \$8,160 during 1981-82, when they instituted a dark campus policy, along with their anti-vandalism program, Project Pride. Project Pride rebates a percentage of the savings resulting from a decrease in projected losses due to vandalism. It also involves a variety of activities including weekly, monthly, and semiannual reports and graphs and charts on vandalism rates.

While the cause and effect between night time blackouts and a reduction in vandalism is not clear cut, no one has reported an increase in vandalism due to night time blackouts.

The Livermore Joint Unified School District has had a dark campus policy since 1974. Director of Facilities Maintenance, Rudy D'Ambra says:

"A dark campus policy positively will not increase vandalism. This is what many people are concerned about, including the police, but it did not happen. We've noticed a slight decrease in vandalism over the years, but we have done other things too, like vandal watches and Sonitrol."

Energy Savings in his district were about ten percent per year after the first full year of the dark campus policy.

California Energy Extension Service