

one with severe bruising and the other concussed, as they leapt out of the path of a Ford F350.

Insp Bill Mathers said

barged a divisional van, then drove up the street before stopping.

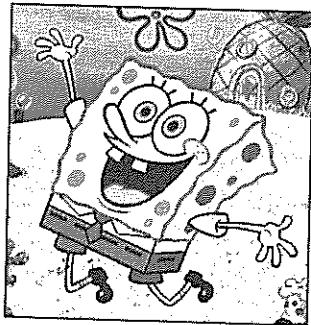
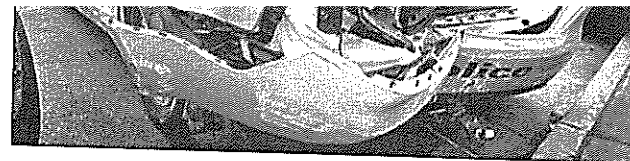
The smash happened after police were called to a

Police believe the driver was linked to the domestic violence report.

"One of the members involved, it was his first shift

posting. The driver suffered minor injuries and was arrested along with his passenger, a man from Sebastapol.

Angus Thompson



Out of toon: SpongeBob.

## Kids all at sea after SpongeBob

THE cartoon *SpongeBob SquarePants* is in hot water after a study suggested that watching him for only nine minutes can cause short-term attention and learning problems in four-year-olds.

The deficiencies were seen in a study of 60 children randomly assigned to watch either *SpongeBob* or the slower-paced cartoon *Billboard* or draw pictures. The children then took mental function tests.

Those who had watched *SpongeBob* did measurably worse than the others. Previous research has linked TV viewing with attention problems, but the new study suggests more immediate problems after very little exposure.

AP

# Anti-Muslim scribblings on the rise across the city

# Graffiti gangs warned

RACIST graffiti is on the rise and gangs have been warned they risk jail under racial vilification laws.

Graffiti removalists say the amount of racist messages has increased, with a noticeable rise in anti-Muslim sentiments.

Muslim leaders said the rise in racist tagging was disturbing and could potentially lead to violence or physical attacks.

Mohammed El-leissy, of the Islamic Council of Victoria, said the graffiti set a dangerous precedent among vandals.

Anne Wright  
city reporter

"It's quite scary, it's public intimidation," he said.

"It really does send a bad message that people are quite happy to be public about this sort of xenophobia and it does create a very dangerous precedent for what we accept in public."

Graffiti Removal Systems owner Greg Ireland told the *Herald Sun* the upsurge was statewide.

"I see a lot more of it, more and more every day," he said. "It's usually very vile

and strong in its nature."

A Victoria Police spokeswoman confirmed racist vandals could be charged under the Racial Vilification Act if an investigation proved the intent behind the graffiti.

"Any investigation into the circumstances and intent behind the graffiti needs to be established first by police in order for a racial vilification offence to be committed," the spokeswoman said.

The maximum penalty for a person found guilty of serious racial vilification is

six months' jail. Mr Ireland said the total cost of graffiti to insurers, councils and police was about \$400 million and a clampdown on tagging gangs was needed.

"Since November last year we have removed close to 35,000 square metres of graffiti across greater Melbourne," he said.

"It needs to be treated more seriously and diversion programs need to be put in place."

Mr Ireland said vandalism of public toilets also needed to be addressed.

"It's alarming what you

see in there. Everything you can think of. It ranges from paedophilia, racist messages, personal attacks, you name it," he said.

Melbourne City Council has about \$1 million a year in its budget to remove graffiti from the city.

Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said the reported increase in abusive graffiti was unacceptable. "It's sort of un-Melbourne and that distresses me," he said.

Cr Doyle said graffiti aimed at a group of people based on religion was ignorant.

wrighta@heraldsun.com.au

## Power surge on charges

POWER companies are exploiting energy laws to jack up charges by hundreds of millions of dollars, consumer groups warn.

They said customers were disadvantaged through a price system weighted heavily in favour of electricity distribution companies and called for federal laws to be amended.

The networks had an "ex-

traordinary advantage" when appealing against independent price determinations by the Australian Energy Regulator, the Consumer Action Law Centre and Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre claimed.

Distributors had been able to pass on costs that were hundreds of millions of dollars higher than initially approved in AER rulings.

Distributor representative Hugo Armstrong rejected the accusations.

"The only things that we can appeal against are mistakes made by the regulator," Mr Armstrong said.

Federal Energy Minister Martin Ferguson said an AER review was seeking the right balance between business and consumers.

Karen Collier

## Facelift for Telstra

TELSTRA is set for an extreme brand makeover.

It will shed much of its staid corporate image in a facelift that will see it use pink and green to attract consumers.

Telstra head David Thodey last night said the nation's biggest telco was keeping its logo but was adopting the "rainbow" of colours to brighten its image and broaden appeal to

the lucrative market of younger phone users.

"It's about appealing to more customers — we've seen massive acceptance in the testing we did," Mr Thodey said.

"We want to be more relevant and our image should reflect that. IBM went through a similar change — I think it's important."

The new branding will be launched on Sunday.