

Neighborhood Watch Registration Guide

Neighborhood Watch Center
Department of Justice
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INTRODUCTION

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Acquisition

Neighborhood Watch, in one form or another, has been around for many years, although the National Sheriffs' Association is recognized as giving life to the modern-day concept in the early 1970s. Today it is one of the most popular and successful of all efforts to prevent crime. Many law enforcement experts credit citizen participation in Neighborhood Watch as one of the primary reasons for a declining burglary rate.

Years ago, there was little need for a program which encouraged citizens to keep a watchful eye on their neighbor's property. In contrast to today, concern for the well-being of neighbors was simply part of being a good neighbor, since family life evolved around the neighborhood.

Today, many people consider their homes to be a retreat from the hazards of everyday living. More often than not, activities that used to build neighborliness now take place outside of the neighborhood.

Like law enforcement officials, criminals recognize that neighbors are less concerned about the safety and security of the community and, therefore, less likely to know or care about the living habits of their neighbors. As a result, criminals know they can move about most neighborhoods without being considered suspicious or conspicuous.

Neighborhood Watch has proven to be one of the most effective means to combat this community apathy. It has proven to be an organized means by which citizens, in concert with law enforcement, can collectively reduce or remove the opportunity for crime.

This guide is intended for the use of community leaders and law enforcement officials who wish to initiate a Neighborhood Watch Program or to strengthen an existing one. Its primary purpose is to present ways in which a community can plan, organize and maintain a watch program. It emphasizes the need for cooperation and coordination between the watch leadership and law enforcement, but recognizes that citizens should take ownership of their watch program. It also suggests that neighborhood groups can initiate and maintain a watch program in those unusual circumstances where law enforcement does not offer such services.

BENEFITS

Even though some neighborhoods are more susceptible to crime than others, all should consider establishing a Neighborhood Watch Program, as there are distinct advantages to low crime neighborhoods as well as those with significant crime problems. Some of the more obvious benefits include:

Prevention of Residential Crime

In many communities, statistics reveal that Neighborhood Watch Programs have succeeded in reducing residential burglary by as much as 50 to 75 percent. Many law enforcement agencies report that in addition to reductions in burglary, Neighborhood Watch Programs have caused substantial declines in thefts of property, vandalism, fraud, sexual assaults and even traffic-related offenses.

The establishment of a Neighborhood Watch Program in a low-crime area is added assurance that it will remain safe. After all, crime is rarely stagnant; it often moves from one neighborhood to the next.

Greater Awareness of Crime

Home security and personal security are enhanced because residents are more aware of the threat of crime. Since they have been exposed to crime prevention information, they are better equipped than the general population to remove or reduce the opportunity for crime.

Enhanced Reporting of Suspicious Activities

Residents are more aware of who belongs in the neighborhood and are more inclined to report suspicious persons and activities to law enforcement. Typically, the number of calls concerning suspicious persons and activities increase substantially after a watch program is established.

Serves As a Warning to Criminals

Neighborhood Watch signs alert the criminal that the neighborhood is concerned about crime and is willing to intervene. It also warns criminals that they are likely to be observed and reported to the authorities if they attempt to commit a crime.

Promotes Neighborliness

Neighborhood Watch encourages residents to interact with each other by exchanging information about work schedules, vacation plans, types of vehicles belonging to the residents, etc. It also requires neighbors to observe the property of others and occasionally attend meetings designed to strengthen neighborhood safety and security.

Access to Crime Data

As previously mentioned, crime often moves from one neighborhood to the next. Obviously, it is important to neighborhoods to have access to information about crime trends that threaten them. Many law enforcement agencies identify trends and patterns through a crime analysis function and routinely notify neighborhood watch leaders of crime-related problems.

Increases Arrest and Convictions

Neighborhood Watch Programs serve as a network through which law enforcement can collect and disseminate information on crime. The following two actual examples illustrate the benefit of Neighborhood Watch to citizens and the criminal justice system.

A crime analysis unit within a large police department detected an emerging pattern of residential burglary. The facts revealed that seven homes within a relatively small area had been entered between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. The

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suspects, three young males, were thought to be driving an old, dark-colored van.

Armed with this and other information, the police department contacted each neighborhood watch coordinator and asked them to have their members be on the lookout for such a van and to obtain a license number, if possible.

One night later, a member of a watch program sighted the van, obtained the license number and reported it to the police. Subsequently, the three suspects were arrested and confessed to the seven previous burglaries.

A similar example involved the abduction and sexual assault of a young woman. While experiencing car trouble she was abducted at gun point and taken to a neighboring jurisdiction, where she was sexually assaulted behind an elementary school.

The investigation revealed that the victim could identify her assailant and his vehicle. However, there were no apparent suspects. Fortunately, the school was in the middle of a Neighborhood Watch area, so the sheriff's department outlined the details of the crime to the neighborhood watch coordinator and asked that the members of the watch be polled to determine if anyone had written down the license plate number of the suspect vehicle.

Luckily, an elderly resident had been walking his dog on the evening of the assault and wrote down the license number, because he felt the car looked suspicious behind the school.

With a license number, the sheriff's department was able to make an arrest. The suspect was positively identified by the victim which resulted in a conviction. The sheriff conceded that it would have been almost impossible to have solved the case without the assistance of the neighborhood watch member who wisely recorded the license number.

INITIATING NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Unlike many law enforcement services, Neighborhood Watch can be initiated by citizens or, of course, by law enforcement. Circumstances which normally serve as the catalyst for the programs include:

- A neighborhood is victimized by burglary, vandalism or other crimes. As a result, concerned neighbors decide to ask their law enforcement agency to assist in starting a watch program.
- Citizens perceive that there is a neighborhood crime problem. Rumors of crimes abound even though there may have been only isolated incidents. Consequently, neighborhood leaders approach law enforcement and request help in initiating a watch program.
- Because of positive publicity about Neighborhood Watch and its successes, residents determine that they should participate in the program and request assistance.
- After engaging in an analysis of crime, law enforcement determines that a residential neighborhood is experiencing a disproportionate amount of crime. Contact is then made with the neighborhood association or leaders to encourage the formation of a watch program.

PLANNING

Frequently, the planning phase of the Neighborhood Watch Program is overlooked. All too often programs begin with a mass meeting at which the benefits of Neighborhood Watch are detailed. Although those in attendance are motivated by the potential for preventing crime, they are often confused as to how to organize to achieve the desired results. Therefore, it is extremely important that careful consideration be given to establishing a sound foundation in order to enhance organization and program longevity.

The following outline discusses some of the more important planning considerations.

Planning Committee

- Prior to embarking on a large scale Neighborhood Watch Program, a small group of concerned citizens and a representative of the law enforcement agency should meet and plan the organization of the program.
- The planning committee may consist of selected members of the civic or homeowners' association or perhaps a committee of the association formed for the purpose of establishing a watch program. If no such homeowners' association exists, members of the committee should represent several different blocks within the neighborhood since some may subsequently serve as block captains. Generally, the resident who contacted the law enforcement agency or vice-versa will assume the responsibility for choosing the committee and convening the group.

NOTE: Retired residents are ideally suited for the planning committee and later to serve as the watch coordinator or block captains. In addition to having time to devote to the program, many have had distinguished careers or have gained valuable planning and organizational skills through other volunteer endeavors.

Functions of the Planning Committee

- To determine the extent and nature of crime in the neighborhood.

Although the law enforcement representative on the committee can generally provide crime data, it is suggested that the committee design a simple neighborhood victimization survey and distribute it to each resident.

The committee may determine that a survey is unnecessary or beyond its capability. Therefore, the survey should be considered optional even though it serves to create an interest in the watch program and will likely increase attendance at the initial meeting.

If the victimization survey is used, a cover letter should explain that a watch program is being planned and that each resident will be notified of the neighborhood meeting. The cover letter should also explain that the survey results will be discussed at that time.

Neighborhood Victimization Survey

1. During the last 12 months, have you or a member of your family been the victim of one of the following crimes while in this neighborhood?

Crimes	Number
• Burglary/breaking and entering	_____
• Larceny—theft of property from yard, outbuilding, ranch, automobile, etc.	_____
• Robbery—theft of property by force or threat of force	Home _____
	Street _____
• Sexual assault—rape or attempted rape	_____
• Vandalism—destruction of property	_____
• Fraud—conned out of money or property	_____
• Other (please list)	_____

2. Total dollar value of property stolen	\$ _____
3. Total dollar value of property recovered	\$ _____
4. If vandalized, total value of property destroyed	\$ _____

5. Did you report the crime to the police/sheriff's department? Yes____ No____
6. During the last 12 months, have you reported a suspicious activity or person to the police/sheriff's department? Yes____ No____
7. Are you interested in participating in a program to make the neighborhood safer? Yes____ No____
8. Optional: Name_____
- Address_____
- Phone No._____
9. Please return this survey to:
- _____
- _____
- _____

• Summarize the Survey

With the help of the law enforcement representative, the committee should analyze the survey results and prepare a summary. The following serves to illustrate:

Dear Resident:

Over the last several weeks each family in this neighborhood was asked to complete a neighborhood victimization survey. Of the 75 surveys that were distributed, 68 were returned.

The survey revealed the following information on crime in this neighborhood for the last 12 months.

Crimes	Number
Burglary	_____
Larceny	_____
Robbery	_____
Sexual Assault	_____
Vandalism	_____
Others	_____
TOTAL	_____

It is reported that a total of \$_____ worth of property was stolen, of which \$_____ was returned to the owner. Residents reported that \$_____ worth of property was destroyed due to vandalism.

Of the _____ total crimes reported on the survey, _____ were reported to the police/sheriff's department.

During the past 12 months, residents of this neighborhood reported _____ suspicious persons or activities to law enforcement.

NOTE: If possible, the above information should be compared to data generated by the law enforcement agency to determine the extent to which crime is being reported.

- Obtain a Map of the Neighborhood

The map should show all of the streets or roads to be covered by the watch program. In most instances, the committee will determine the boundaries if they are not already well defined. If a map is not available, the committee should design one.

- Identify a Potential Watch Coordinator and Block Captains

Typically, the neighborhood watch coordinator will come from within the planning committee. Since a captain is needed for each block or road, the committee may need to recruit residents that are not members of the committee. In so doing, the committee should use the map to determine where block or road captains are needed. If the watch area is rural, the decision has to be made as to how many captains are required per road in the affected area.

In most instances, volunteers can be found through referrals by other residents. Remember, some of the most able block captains will be retired residents who have the interest and the time.

After identifying potential volunteers, contact them and explain the duties of the block captains. Attempt to obtain a commitment so they can be introduced at the Neighborhood Watch meeting.

- Select Date and Time for Neighborhood Watch Meeting

The date and time must be negotiated with the planning committee's law enforcement representative since he or she is likely to have a number of other commitments. Make sure the watch meeting doesn't conflict with PTA or other community meetings that may involve a number of families.

- Choose and Secure Meeting Facility

The meeting site should be as close to the neighborhood as possible. Most churches will gladly accommodate such groups. Other possibilities include schools, community centers, police stations, fire stations, etc.

- Send Out Notices of Meeting

Neighborhood Watch Meeting

Date:

Time:

Location:

Dear Neighbor:

According to the Neighborhood Victimization Survey, crime is a concern in this neighborhood. However, crime is not inevitable; we can do something about it if we join together.

At least one member of each family should plan to attend this very important meeting to organize a Neighborhood Watch Program. Neighborhood Watch has proven to be one of the most effective means to prevent crime. In some communities crime has actually been reduced by 75 percent as a result of neighbors joining together to watch and protect their neighbor's property and family.

In addition to organizing the watch program, we will summarize the victimization survey, outline the benefits and expected results of the program and select a coordinator and block captains.

The meeting will end by _____, at which time refreshments will be served.

Neighborhood Watch Planning Committee

Neighborhood Watch Meeting

- Select a Spokesperson

One member of the planning committee must serve as facilitator during the neighborhood meeting. Ideally, it should be someone other than the member who has agreed to serve as coordinator.

- Refreshments

If possible, the committee should provide refreshments after the meeting. If the cost is prohibitive, perhaps a business could be persuaded to contribute and, of course, be given the appropriate credit.

- Meeting Agenda

The following serves as an example:

1. Purpose of meeting
2. Introduction of Planning Committee
3. Brief background of committee's activities
4. Summary of victimization survey and general discussion of crime
5. Benefits of organizing watch program
6. Organization of Neighborhood Watch and expected results
7. Selection of coordinator and block captains (If previously selected, introduce them to attendees. For blocks with no captains, ask for volunteers.)
8. Inform attendees that their block captains will be contacting them in the near future.

NOTE: Every effort should be made to start and end the meeting on time.

ORGANIZATION

Even though Neighborhood Watch is a relatively simple concept of preventing neighborhood crime, it requires considerable organization if citizens and law enforcement are to realize its many benefits. Without a strong organization, members often lose interest after the initial crime problem has been decreased. Once interest has waned, it has proven to be difficult to recreate interest and action.

The following are organizational considerations which have proven successful in Neighborhood Watch Programs:

Neighborhood Watch Committee

The neighborhood watch coordinator and block captains are the most crucial positions in a watch program. They provide leadership and coordination and essentially serve as the neighborhood watch committee. As such, the committee has the following responsibilities:

- To maintain and expand the program to include as many residents as possible
- To set forth program objectives and strategies in concert with law enforcement that will make the neighborhood safer
- Plan and provide for the implementation of a crime prevention program which is beneficial to the neighborhood
- Plan neighborhood watch meetings and notify members
- Assess the success of the program and provide feedback to residents

Responsibilities of the Coordinator

- Serves as liaison between law enforcement agency and the block captains. The coordinator is responsible for disseminating information from law enforcement to the block captains and vice-versa.
- Serves as chairman of neighborhood watch committee
- Presides over neighborhood watch meetings
- Seeks program resources and material and makes available to block captains for distribution

- Directs the activities of the block captains
- Provides reports to the civic association, if one exists
- Maintains a master list of all watch members
- Works with block captains to develop specific crime prevention projects for the neighborhood

Responsibilities of the Block Captains

- Serves as liaison between the watch coordinator and the residents
- Recruits new watch members, striving for 100 percent participation in the block or blocks for which he/she has responsibilities
- Assists the coordinator in planning and conducting meetings and related activities
- Maintains list of members on block, including name, address, work and home phone, vehicle type and license number and hours normally worked
- Prepares and distributes map of block containing above information and makes available to residents of the block
- Notify residents of meetings and training sessions
- Designates work assignments as needed. Among others, they include: secretarial; fundraising to purchase signs, electric engravers, written materials, audio-visual, etc.; walking or mobile patrol; vacation house checks; and checking on elderly or infirmed residents.
- obtain victimization data from residents on a regularly scheduled basis

Role of Law Enforcement Agency

The extent to which law enforcement is actively involved in Neighborhood Watch Programs depends upon the availability of manpower and program resources. Notwithstanding, the typical responsibilities of law enforcement include:

- Maintaining contact with watch coordinator
- Notifying coordinator of any crime trends or patterns that may threaten the neighborhood

- Meeting with neighborhood watch committee on a periodic basis to address crime problems and plan strategies
- Providing crime awareness training to residents
- Training members of the watch committee and other selected residents to conduct security inspections of their homes, as well as those of other residents
- Serving as a resource for acquiring speakers for programs, obtaining handout material and visual aids, and providing signs, decals, etc.

Types of Neighborhood Watch Programs

Neighborhood Watch is simply a crime prevention concept that calls for citizens to watch out for their neighbor's property. Knowing this, the criminal is unwilling to risk being detected, so he either does not commit the crime or goes elsewhere.

Because neighborhoods are different in terms of geography, population, extent and nature of crime, Neighborhood Watch Programs must vary from area to area if they wish to be successful. A criminal may be dissuaded from committing a crime in one neighborhood deploying passive observation while willing to take the risk in a more rural community if the same strategy prevails.

Some of the basic program variances include:

- **Passive Observations**

This is the most common of all watch programs. It's best suited for dense to moderately dense neighborhoods where homes can be readily observed. Basically, it calls for residents to observe the activities of their neighbors in order to detect suspicious or unusual activities.

- **Walking Patrols**

Many neighborhoods that experience a significant amount of crime assign residents to walk within a several block area to actively look for suspicious activities. Usually, the walking patrols are done in pairs—

husband and wife, or two neighbors during periods that crime is most likely to occur. Upon observing suspicious activities, walking patrols are to call their law enforcement agency and are cautioned against personal intervention. Unique decals on residents' automobiles are helpful in identifying vehicles that belong in the neighborhood.

- Mobile Patrols

Such patrols are frequently employed in communities where homes are spaced a considerable distance from one another, making passive observations and walking patrols impractical. Mobile patrols are normally used during high-crime periods and many use C.B. radios for communicating suspicious activities or persons.

NOTE: *Neighborhood Watch is designed to prevent, detect and report crimes. Enforcement action must **always** be left to the police or sheriff's department.*

Program Elements

Some of the more common elements of watch programs include:

- Neighborhood Watch Signs

Signs are extremely important to the program because they put the potential criminal on notice that a watch program exists and that citizens are trained to observe and report. *Signs should never be constructed unless there is an active and organized program.*

Many law enforcement departments require neighborhoods to enroll at least 75 percent of the families before a sign is constructed.

- Neighborhood Watch Decals

In many rural communities each home participating in the program is designated by a decal or small sign affixed to a post or paper box. These signs are remind-

ers that there is a watch program and, equally important, that the resident is security conscious.

- **Vehicle Stickers**

Many neighborhood watch groups provide distinctive vehicle stickers which identify residents' vehicles. Obviously, it does not imply that vehicles without stickers are suspicious, only that they may require closer scrutiny.

- **Exchange of Information**

One of the primary benefits of Neighborhood Watch is that it forces neighbors to exchange information about their personal living habits. Often this is done in conjunction with a map of the block or area in which the resident lives. The following map is typical of most neighborhood watch groups.

Neighborhood Watch Block Map

4th Avenue

Name _____
 H Phone _____
 W Phone _____
 Address _____

Name _____
 H Phone _____
 W Phone _____
 Address _____

Elm Street

Name _____
 H Phone _____
 W Phone _____
 Address _____

Name _____
 H Phone _____
 W Phone _____
 Address _____

Name _____
 H Phone _____
 W Phone _____
 Address _____

3rd Avenue

Although this information is considered to be basic to most programs, others require block captains to collect and make available to residents other personal information. Such data can be presented in booklet form with the watch coordinator retaining the master copy for all blocks.

Neighbor Data Sheet

Address: _____ Phone No.: _____

Family Name: _____

Husband: _____ wk. phone: _____

Wife: _____ wk. phone: _____

Children: _____ Age: _____

_____ Age: _____

_____ Age: _____

_____ Age: _____

Others: _____

Individual to contact in an emergency:

Name: _____ Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Vehicles:

Yr./Make

Color

License No.

Special health/medical problems: _____

Any other pertinent information: _____

- **Property Identification**

"Operation Identification" is a property marking program which requires citizens to inscribe their personal property with a unique identifying number to prevent theft and to enhance the identification and return of property in the event it's stolen. Many law enforcement agencies recommend the use of the social security number because it serves as the driver's license number in a majority of the states and is therefore accessible by law enforcement.

In some instances, law enforcement makes available the electric engravers to citizens on a short-term loan basis. Since the number of engravers are normally limited, it is suggested that neighborhood watch groups purchase a supply of engravers and loan them to residents.

- **Residential Security Inspection**

Although Neighborhood Watch is a community program, it is most successful when individuals are aware of the threat of crime and take individual action to reduce or remove the opportunity for it within their home. A residential security inspection program is designed to identify security weaknesses around the residence so that corrective action can be taken. Typically, this service is provided by law enforcement agencies. However, in some instances, law enforcement has trained selected citizens to enable them to provide the service to others in the neighborhood.

A number of neighborhood watch groups require homeowners to have their property inspected as a condition to participating in the program.

- **Block Mothers**

This program is particularly beneficial in neighborhoods with a number of youngsters. The project requires identifying one house on a block where children can seek adult assistance in times of emergency. Block mothers normally do not work outside the home. Their residence is identified by a decal or small sign which notifies youngsters that a block mother is available for help.

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Other projects that have proven popular with neighborhood watch groups include:

- Proposing crime prevention legislation to local and state elected officials
- Regularly scheduled calls or visits to elderly and infirmed residents who live alone
- Assigning specific residents to check on homes and property of neighbors who are away from their homes due to vacation, etc.
- Instruction for at least one citizen of each block in first aid and CPR
- Conduct bicycle safety inspections and clinics for area youngsters
- Fingerprint neighborhood youths and adults who have not been fingerprinted

Meetings and Training Sessions

- Neighborhood Watch Meeting

To maintain interest in watch programs, the committee should consider conducting watch meetings at least quarterly. Each meeting should be devoted to business-related discussions followed by a training program. The business portion of the meeting routinely consists of:

1. Minutes of last meeting
2. Treasurer's report, if applicable
3. Brief activity report from each block captain
4. Update of crime in the neighborhood
5. Committee reports, if applicable
6. New business

• Training Sessions

Training sessions should be an integral part of each neighborhood watch meeting. The topics should address the concerns of the members. Some of the prevalent topics include:

1. Home security
2. Selecting and installing locking devices
3. Personal safety and self defense
4. Safety tips for senior citizens
5. Fraud
6. Annoying telephone calls
7. Safety tips for baby sitters
8. Recognizing substance abuse
9. Vandalism prevention
10. Fire prevention
11. Victim-Witness services
12. Larceny prevention
13. Others

Depending on the nature of the neighborhood or community, other more specialized training programs can be arranged.

Generally, law enforcement can provide the training topics listed above, given the availability of manpower and expertise. Because they may be working with a number of other groups, it is crucial that meeting dates be carefully coordinated.

Even though law enforcement may be the primary source of speakers, other resources should not be overlooked. Among others, they include:

- State Police
- Federal Enforcement Agencies
- Postal Inspection
- Mental Health Agencies
- State Offices on Aging
- Security Firms/Associations
- Insurance
- Farming Organizations
- Others

EVALUATION

Evaluating a Neighborhood Watch Program can be as simple as determining whether crime has increased or decreased as a result of establishing the program. With sufficient baseline data against which to compare, a more thorough assessment can be undertaken. Obviously, the degree to which the program is evaluated depends on the capability of the watch group and law enforcement. Regardless of the extent of the evaluation, members should be afforded the opportunity to determine if these efforts are worthwhile. The following serves as a method of evaluating the effort if comparative data is available.

Neighborhood Watch Evaluation

	Six Months Prior to Program	Six Months After Program	% Change
# Sexual Assault			
# Robbery			
# Burglary			
# Larceny			
# Vandalism			
# Fraud			
Value of Stolen Property			
Value of Recovered Property			
Value of Destroyed Property			
# of Calls for Suspi- cious Persons/ Activities			
Number of Members	N/A		
Number Participating in Operation ID			
Number of Security Inspections			
Number Trained			