

Neighborhood Crime Watch



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Neighborhood Crime Watch – What is it?

Very few people are in a position to protect their homes and property 100% of the time. Vacation, business, and shopping trips, or even an evening out will leave homes unattended and vulnerable to theft.

Neighborhood Crime Watch is a program of mutual assistance among neighbors aimed at reducing crime in the community at the grass roots level. It involves getting to know one's neighbors and introducing them to the concept of Neighborhood Crime Watch - that is good neighbors working together, alert to the potential of crime, and willing to look out for one another's interests. **Neighbors working together through Neighborhood Crime Watch can combat crime in their area the most effective way - BEFORE IT STARTS!**

One important criterion to ensure a well maintained Neighborhood Crime Watch is to have a minimum of 60% residential participation!!

Citizens offer an open invitation to criminals every day when they leave their doors unlocked, advertise their absence from home with an unlit house, piled up newspapers, or leave car keys in the ignition.

When formulating a crime control strategy, one must consider which course is more effective and less costly: hundreds of law enforcement personnel in every neighborhood and a guard at every door - OR - **ADEQUATE LIGHTING, SECURE HOMES AND WATCHFUL NEIGHBORS.** It would appear that crime prevention is the most logical and most economical approach to take in crime control.

Neighborhood Crime Watch provides a means of reducing the opportunity for crime to occur, through the active participation of citizens in crime prevention. Citizens are taught how to make their homes less of an attractive target for thieves, how to participate in Operations Identification, making their property less desirable to thieves, and how to be alert to suspicious activity in the neighborhood.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES OF NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH

1. Maintain a minimum level of 60% residential participation (a cooperative system of surveillance over one another's property, etc.)
2. Report suspicious activity or persons or crimes in progress to the Sheriff's Department accurately and immediately.
3. Mutually assist and encourage the accomplishment of home security inspections, target hardening and property marking activities by all neighborhood residents
4. Assist the victims of crime and assist in their readjustment to normalcy.
5. Encourage citizens to come forward as witnesses.
6. Help elderly citizens and children to protect themselves against being a victim of a criminal and push for additional projects to protect these special groups of persons whenever necessary.

Neighborhood Crime Watch and the Theory of Reduction of Opportunity

MOST RESIDENTIAL CRIMES OCCUR BECAUSE THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMIT THEM EXISTED!

1. The opportunity created by the victim through carelessness, lack of attention of security and failure to cooperate with neighbors.
2. The opportunity created by the criminal, by his skill, ruthlessness, and daring. (This describes the professional criminal. It is believed by law enforcement that a small minority of crime is resultant from the professional criminal. The bulk of crime involves skilled or unskilled amateurs and centers on opportunities created by the victim themselves.

DUTIES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH CHAIRPERSON

The appointment of the proper Chairperson can determine the success of the program. This person should have prestige within the community, an ability to communicate, and some free time. The Chairperson should preside over all meetings as well as:

1. Set up the initial meeting to explain the concept of Neighborhood Crime Watch
2. Obtain Block Captains in the neighborhood and set up a file with their names, addresses, and phone numbers.
3. Serve as liaison between the Neighborhood Crime Watch group and the Crime Prevention Unit Officer.
4. Assist in the development of any program that would be beneficial to the community.
5. Keep a master list of all participants in the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program.
6. Distribute information and necessary materials to Block Captains.
7. Schedule the location for monthly meetings as well as obtaining speakers for the program.
8. Welcome new neighbors to the community and encourage their participation on the Neighborhood Crime Watch.
9. Keep a master list of emergency telephone notification system.

DUTIES OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH BLOCK CAPTAINS

1. Block Captains shall compile a list of all those on his/her block who wish to participate, as well as their addresses and telephone numbers.
2. Block Captains shall relay telephone calls from the Chairperson to back-up Captains in the block. If one of the persons is not at home try at another time.
3. Block Captains shall distribute literature to Crime Watchers when necessary.
4. Block Captains shall assist the Chairperson with meetings.
5. Block Captains should maintain a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other Block Captains in the neighborhood.
6. Block Captains shall report to the Chairperson any arrest resulting from information from Block Watchers and any suspicious vehicles or persons.

HOW THE TELEPHONE CHAIN WORKS

1. Determine from block watchers and neighbors the best time to call to relay the chain. Ask whether they wish to be called during the night in emergency situations. Example: burglar running the general direction of neighbors homes or adjoining blocks.
2. When one is going to be away, notify the Block Captain and immediate neighbors.
3. Report anything suspicious to the local law enforcement agency. They would prefer to spend 10 minutes checking out a call than 10 days following up on a crime that has already been committed.
4. When the call originates from the law enforcement agency investigating the crime rather than neighbors give information to the officer only and do not call the victim.
5. Call the victim (discretion is advised) if more information is needed to substantiate observations of suspicious activity. Report these observations to the law enforcement agency only.
6. When information has been ascertained that the report has led to an arrest of a suspect; contact the officer handling the case or the Crime Prevention Officer and Neighborhood Chairperson.

7. NEVER CONFRONT A SUSPECT! ! THIS CAN BE DEADLY!!

8. YOU ARE NOT THE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT OR CONSTABLE'S DEPARTMENT. YOU WORK WITH THESE DEPARTMENTS.

9. As a Crime Watcher one is considered to be the **eyes and ears** of the **Sheriff or Constable's Department**. The importance as a Crime Watcher cannot be overemphasized.

YOUR PART IN THE CHAIN

1. Keep pen and special phone pad near the phone at all times to write important information down that has been received.
2. Be brief and precise in all calls.
3. This is not a social call and discuss only the issue at hand.
4. Relay information exactly as it is given. Do not delete from or add information given to you.
5. Repeat the information to the person calling for accuracy.
6. Information given to the subdivision by the Crime Prevention Officer or investigating officer is to be shared only with Crime Watchers. The criminal need not hear of his escapades from neighborhood gossip whereby his/her actions might be altered for the worse.
7. Make the call(s) as soon as possible! !
8. If you have been victimized or have seen a suspect or vehicle reported in the Chain - call your Block Captain and or Chairperson and advise them.

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING TO THE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

It is extremely important that one becomes thoroughly familiar with all instructions on this page so when the time occurs, one can function as a Crime Watcher properly by reporting suspicious activities, a crime in progress, or an emergency - BE PREPARED! !

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Crime in Progress call: 911

Harris County Precinct 4 Constable: 281-376-3472

Harris County Sheriff Department : 713-221-6000

1. Identify yourself: Name, address, phone number
2. Type of Crime: Burglary, assault, suspicious person(s), vehicle(s), etc.
3. Is the crime in progress?
4. Where is it: Name of building or landmark if no address can be given.
5. Is the suspect(s) armed? With what (gun, knife, etc.)
6. Description of suspect(s) and/or vehicle(s). Be specific
7. Direction in which the suspect(s) were traveling.
8. What was taken (if known)
9. How was entry made: door, window, etc.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

Suspicious incident or crime in progress in the neighborhood.

- A. First call 911, Constable at 281-376-3472 or Sheriff's Department at 713- 221-6000. The Block Captain should be notified as soon as possible in case the suspect is still in the area. The Block Captain sets a visual perimeter "fence" around the area by calling others in the Chain. This could aid the Sheriff's Department in tracing the suspect if he/she attempt to flee the area.
- B. Block Captains should notify the Chairperson as soon as possible after setting up the visual perimeter. This would be helpful should the area of search need to be broadened. The Neighborhood Chairperson then alerts other Block Captains in the immediate vicinity, should it become necessary.

Suspicious vehicle/suspicious person

- A. These situations should be handled with care and common sense. Many times the "suspicious"

label is applied because the vehicle or person is out of his/her apparent environment, i.e. - a beaten up van in an upper class residential area.

- B. Keep in mind that there are no laws or ordinances specifying where or when any vehicle or person may travel on a public roadway.
- C. If a vehicle is parked in the area for an extensive period of time or is observed cruising repeatedly through the area or if a person is loitering in the area, obtain a license number, description, note what appeared to be suspicious and call the Sheriff's Department (713) 221-6000. A large percentage of calls do assist in the apprehension of criminals.
- D. Block Captains should be informed of sightings of these vehicles or persons to be passed on to Chairperson.
- E. If possible, obtain the license number of a suspicious vehicle, without jeopardizing your safety - LOG the DATE, TIME, LOCATION, NUMBER and VEHICLE DESCRIPTION and forward it to the Sheriff's Department when they arrive.

The KEY is Communication and Information. You are NOT expected to solve the crimes, nor are you to interfere with the investigation. BUT YOU ARE IN A POSITION TO gather and provide information to the Precinct Constable or Sheriff's Department through the Neighborhood Crime Watch Telephone Chain.

HOW TO MAKE THE NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH WORK

I. Talk it up. Keep people thinking about Neighborhood Crime Watch.

Remind your neighbors of the importance of observance of suspicious activity and criminal activity and reporting it to the Sheriff's Department. Getting people to remember to get off of the couch and check the area is probably the hardest part of the Neighborhood Crime Watch.

II. Try to "socialize" your neighborhood. The most effective Neighborhood Crime Watch groups have been in areas which have an active Civic Association which hold monthly meetings and sponsors social gatherings, picnics, and other events. Getting your neighbors to know each other and develop friendships is a key to getting people concerned about each others welfare and threats to their security.

III. Try to "clean up" your neighborhood. An unkempt area, unsightly lawns, junk stored by houses, unpainted houses, decaying fences, and trash strewn around are a statement that people do not care and are an open invitation to criminals. Studies have shown that the appearance of an area is influential in discouraging intruders. Another point found effective in turning away criminals is delineating property boundaries with shrubbery and fencing not necessarily chain link fencing or privacy fences even a low white picket fence says, "this is my property - keep out." The same effect has been achieved in apartment complexes by using different colored carpeting and doorways for each apartment entrance. Sometimes psychological barriers can be as strong as physical ones.

IV. Brighten your neighborhood. While many burglaries occur in the morning and early afternoon a number occur at night and almost all vandalism occurs at night. The best and cheapest deterrent to nighttime criminal activity is lighting. Football field lighting is not necessary, just enough light to enable a resident to recognize a prowler or to make a prowler think he/she can be recognized. Many options are available including formation of a street lighting district to shared installation of dawn to dusk lights in back yards. Some power companies will install this type of lighting on existing utility poles. Again this measure is more psychological than physical, but it works!

MAINTAINING THE NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH PROGRAM

It may be difficult to keep up the initial enthusiasm of the Neighborhood Crime Watch group. As crime is lessened in your area residents may become less interested in attending meetings while still remaining concerned about crime.

Your Crime Prevention Officer will be able to continue assistance as needed.

Strong leadership (and neighborhood participation) is essential to maintain the active involvement of the community in the neighborhood Crime Watch Program. The Chairperson and Block Captains, vitally interested in the security of the neighborhood, are decidedly an asset in motivating the group to realize their objectives. The Block Captains may become involved in training other Block Captains as well as replacement should he/she move from the community.

As crime is lessened within the community, citizens may broaden their scope to maintain the functioning as a group. Residents may concern themselves with the total quality of living in their neighborhood. Community pride may be a strong motivation in maintaining the program.

The continued value of citizen's involvement in Protecting their neighborhood is the primary Concern of an effective and successful Neighborhood Crime Watch Program!!