

# **Neighborhood Watch Program**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In early 1972, the National Sheriffs' Association, in an effort to address the increase burglary rates across the country, created a model program that developed into the blueprint for what has become today's Neighborhood Watch Program. In the beginning, the program consisted of encouraging neighbors to be vigilant and report suspected criminal or suspicious activity to the local law enforcement agency. Local law enforcement enlisted the cooperation and involvement of citizens to take a proactive role in reducing the risk of victimization within their neighborhoods. It was quickly recognized that communities capable of securing the assistance of their residents in observing, recognizing and reporting criminal or suspicious activity, were in a better position to reduce the burglary rate, as well as decreasing other crimes and criminal behavior.

Established as the largest single organized crime prevention project in the nation, Neighborhood Watch forges strong bonds among residents that have become the essence of this crime fighting program. Neighborhood Watch groups generate an atmosphere of community and civic pride by creating committed groups of citizens dedicated to the improvement to the quality of life in their communities. Entering into a partnership with the Director of Emergency Services, community residents assume the role as "eyes and ears" of their post Police. Empowered with shared ownership of their communities, residents are given a greater sense of control and assurance of a united stance against criminal behavior in their neighborhoods. Serving as a springboard, a Neighborhood Watch program can introduce other crime prevention strategies such as: safe houses, property identification programs, and auto anti-theft programs just to name a few.

## 2. BENEFITS OF NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

In addition to preventing criminal behavior and reducing the fear of victimization, Neighborhood Watch creates community and civic pride by all residents and develops an atmosphere of camaraderie among members of the community and members of law enforcement. With an established public voice, residents can address and provide input into the improvement of child safety, youth development and other quality of life issues through other post programs and agencies. Immediate benefits of Neighborhood Watch are:

- (1) Deters criminal activity.
- (2) Creates a greater sense of security and reduces fear of crime.
- (3) Builds bonds with neighbors; people look out for one another; and it stimulates neighborhood awareness.
- (4) Reduces the risk of becoming a crime victim; it reduces the physical, financial and psychological cost of crime.

- (5) Resident training on how to observe and report suspicious activity in their community.
- (6) Addresses quality of life issues and mutual interests in the community.
- (7) Enhances homeland security.

### 3. GETTING STARTED

Solving community based problems associated with crime and quality of life issues can be complex and interrelated and at times seen daunting, time consuming and frustrating. Experience has shown the best approach to combating crime and fear as well as other systematic problems in America's communities requires organized efforts involving collaborative problem solving. A grassroots neighborhood group has the power, strength and safety of numbers. While a group is more productive than one person, the same is true for organizations that work together as allies. Partnering with law enforcement and joining forces with other civic groups and stakeholders maximizes the neighborhood group's effectiveness. When a variety of people and groups with different views, resources and skills come together to solve community problems, goals can be accomplished and communities develop a productive attitude and confidence. Neighborhood Watches are driven by the energy and dedication of their members and the hope of improving their quality of life.

Getting projects, including a Neighborhood Watch off the ground takes time. Problems don't develop overnight and unfortunately neither do the solutions. When a neighborhood decides to form a Neighborhood Watch, it is recommended they take the following steps:

**SURVEY:** Talk with neighborhood residents to determine their concerns, interests, and their willingness to work for their neighborhood. Using the information developed in the survey to create a detailed list (e.g. name, address, and telephone numbers) of those interested in joining a Neighborhood Watch.

**SEEK:** Obtain guidance, assistance and information from your Police Department and other post programs and agencies. By networking, coordinating, cooperating, sharing and collaborating, neighborhood residents and other members of the post community can achieve their objectives more easily than if they were working in isolation. When alliances among different groups are established, people see that they have more in common than they previously imagined, and that there is more to be gained by partnering on projects.

**DEVELOP:** Start strategies with a core group on recruiting and mobilizing a larger group of interested members of the neighborhood in order to a start-up/planning meeting. Utilize the information obtained for other agencies and organizations within the post community.

**CONTACT:** Speak with your Police Department to develop a good working relationship; you might consider inviting their representative to your start-up meeting. Anti-crime activists achieve better results when they work collaboratively with law enforcement and other public service organizations. Discussions with the Director of Emergency Services should

include an assessment of the problems in the neighborhood, strategies and methods to address these problems, membership recruitment, bylaws and training.

**HOLD A START-UP MEETING:** Formulate a mission statement and establish priorities and goals for the organization. The key to having a successful first meeting is to involve all attendees. It is important that the host/facilitator be motivated and encourages those in attendance to become active participants and express their views and ideas to help create an atmosphere of success. The organizer must be able to recognize and appreciate different viewpoints and approaches to the community's concerns. The following suggestions are offered to assist in having a successful first meeting:

- (1) Give your neighbors an opportunity to socialize before the meeting begins.
- (2) Prepare an agenda, which should represent a collaborative effort for a core group of dedicated residents.
- (3) Establish guidelines to encourage honesty, confidentiality and responsibility to the group.
- (4) Have those in attendance introduce themselves. Prepare and distribute an attendance sheet with each participant's name, address and phone number.
- (5) Early in the meeting, allow everyone to talk about themselves, their values, experiences, their concerns for the community and their ideas. Identify basic safety issues in and around your neighborhood. Brainstorm about their underlying causes.
- (6) Establish priorities and goals and formulate a mission statement for the watch. While you will experience diversity of opinions, build on the ideas that are agreed upon.
- (7) Develop an action or strategic plan identifying specific community changes. The plan should be precise, specifying who will perform each task and the timetable for completion. The planning process should be inclusive, involving members of the neighborhood that may have influence in the post community (e.g. members of post programs, commanders and enlisted leaders) as well as others.
- (8) Identify key personnel and resources to help in solving the neighborhood's problems (e.g. DES representative, JAG, DPW, MWR, Army Community Services, Installation Chaplain and CID).
- (9) Elect a coordinator or chairperson, a co-chairperson and a secretary to maintain records of meetings and other important events. Establish committees to assist in inviting guest speakers to future meetings, distributing flyers and brochures, to work on communications and publications and a planning committee for special events and projects.
- (10) Provide refreshments which will present another opportunity for socialization.

**ESTABLISH:** Start policies and procedures to encourage people to join the Neighborhood Watch. New recruits should be introduced to the principles or mission of the organization and the way the watch operates. Encourage new members to actively pursue their interests and serve on any committees.

**IDENTIFY:** Have additional activities that the Neighborhood Watch may get involved with including community clean-ups, block parties, community gardens, community charity projects, safety fairs and youth recreation.

#### 4. ROLES AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

All residents in a community are welcome to join the Neighborhood Watch, acting as the “eyes and ears” of law enforcement and not as vigilantes. Each member is encouraged to actively participate in the security and well being of the community. It only takes a one concerned resident to spearhead the establishment of a Neighborhood Watch program in their neighborhood. Partnering with the DES, every member of a neighborhood can become a vital element in the safety and security of residences, property and personal well being.

##### (1) DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

As the Director of Emergency Services’ representative, the Crime Prevention Officer will assist residents in organizing their Neighborhood Watch programs and will provide information and insight into establishing the geographic boundaries encompassing the watch group. Additional instructions will also be provided on how to request assistance in the event someone is threatened or in danger. Emphasis will be placed on the understanding that members of the Neighborhood Watch Group are not to, under any circumstance, confront a suspect or take any risk to prevent a crime from occurring or facilitate an arrest.

##### (2) BLOCK CAPTAINS / CO-BLOCK CAPTAINS

Serving as the community’s representative, the block captain works to sustain and expand the program by such means as; maintaining a current list of participants, arranging training sessions on various quality of life issues, obtaining current crime prevention information and material for distribution throughout the neighborhood and continuously coordinates with the DES and other post programs and agencies. As the liaison between the community residents and outside partners, the block captain will ensure that all information in relationship to the success of the program is relayed not only to all member of the watch program but all residents of the community. To provide an opportunity for residents to voice concerns in identifying block problems and designing corrective actions, the block captain will convene and chair regularly scheduled block meetings. In an effort to involve all members of the neighborhood, they will seek out volunteers for various committees and recruit new members.

##### (3) SECRETARY

Assisting the block captain in organizing the watch program, they will maintain a written record of block meetings and compiling a list of members. As committees are formed for specific actions or special events, the secretary will document volunteers, positions, purpose of the committee and action completed. The responsibility of the secretary will also encompass completing all formal written correspondence on behalf of the block captain and the various watch committees.

#### (4) MEMBERS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Representing diversity, each member of the community possesses specialized skills and abilities that may be utilized to expand the security of the community, increase the quality of life of all members of the neighborhood and improve neighbor relations. Volunteering for various committees, participating in neighborhood activities, and sharing responsibility for the safety and security of neighbors, residents form the core of, and provide success to, the watch program.

#### 5. RESOURCES

In an effort to make communities safer, there are a number of organizations established to assist neighborhoods to take an active role in the security of their residents. The following list is provided to assist block captains and residents alike to get organized and take control of their neighborhoods:

**National Crime Prevention Council**

<http://www.ncpc.org>

**National Sheriffs Association**

<http://www.sheriffs.org>

**National Association of Town Watch**

<http://natw.org>

**Community-Oriented Police Office**

(COPS) <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov>

#### 6. CONCLUSION

Neighborhood Watch is both a style and a philosophy in the delivery of law enforcement services. The foundation of a successful Neighborhood Watch is recognized as the close interactive relationship between law enforcement officers and members of the community closely working together. In this era of decreasing resources, Neighborhood Watch offers a cost-effective way to make neighborhoods safer. Under this crime fighting strategy, the community and law enforcement can greatly increase their capability to deter crime, restore trust and improve the quality-of-life in their communities.