

Neighborhood Watch Organizer's Guide

People Working Together Can Make a Difference!

Crime and fear of crime threaten a community's well-being -people become afraid to use streets and parks, suspicion erupts between young and old, businesses gradually leave. Crime in turn feeds on the isolation it creates. Today's lifestyles -many homes where both parents work, more single-parent families, and greater job mobility -can contribute to community isolation and weaken civic ties.

You and your neighbors can prevent or break this vicious cycle, and in the process, build your community into a safer, friendlier and more caring place to live. Statistics tell the story. Police and sheriffs' departments in cities, small towns, and suburbs throughout the country report substantial decreases in crime and fear because of local crime prevention efforts.

Start with a Neighborhood Watch or block club to address immediate crime problems, focus on home security, and build neighborhood cohesion. Then move into other areas such as educating residents about child protection, drug abuse prevention, victim services, and domestic violence prevention and intervention. Explore circumstances in the community that might contribute to crime-such as the physical design of buildings, traffic patterns, drug trafficking, few jobs or recreational opportunities for teenagers, lack of affordable housing-and look for long range solutions.

The First Building Block - Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch, Block Watch, Town Watch, Apartment Watch, Crime Watch-no matter what it's called, this is one of the most effective and least costly answers to crime. Watch groups are a foundation of community crime prevention, they can be a stepping stone to community revitalization.

Getting Started-Meetings, Block Captains, and Maps

- Form a small planning committee of neighbors to discuss needs, the level of interest, possible challenges, and the Watch concept.
- Contact the local police or sheriffs department, or local crime prevention organization, to discuss
- Neighborhood Watch and local crime problems. Invite a law enforcement officer to attend your meeting.
- Publicize your meeting at least one week in advance with door-to-door fliers and follow-up with phone calls the day before.
- Select a meeting place that is accessible to people with disabilities.
- Hold an initial meeting to gauge neighbors' interest: establish purpose of program: and begin to identify issues that need to be addressed. Stress that a Watch group is an association of neighbors who look out for each other's families and property, alert the police to any suspicious activities or crime in progress, and work together to make their community a safer and better place to live.



When the neighborhood decides to adopt the Watch

idea it should:

- Elect a chairperson.
- Ask for block captain volunteers who are responsible for relaying information to members on their block, keeping up-to-date information on residents, and making special efforts to involve the elderly, working parents, and young people. Block captains also can serve as liaisons between the neighborhood and the police and communicate information about meetings and crime incidents to all residents.
- Establish a regular means of communicating with Watch members- e.g. newsletter, telephone tree, e-mail, fax, etc.
- Prepare a neighborhood map showing names, addresses, and phone numbers of participating households and distribute to members. Block captains keep this map up to date, contacting newcomers to the neighborhood and rechecking occasionally with ongoing participants.

With guidance from a law enforcement agency, the Watch trains its members in home security techniques, observation skills, and crime reporting. Residents also learn about the types of crime that affect the area.

If you are ready to post Neighborhood Watch signs, check with law enforcement to see if they have such eligibility requirements as number of houses that participate in the program. Law enforcement may also be able to provide your program with signs. If not, they can probably tell you where you can order them.

Organizers and block captains must emphasize that Watch groups are not vigilantes and do not assume the role of the police. They only ask neighbors to be alert, observant, and caring-and to report suspicious activity or crimes immediately to the police.

Tips for Success

- Hold regular meetings to help residents get to know each other and to collectively decide upon program strategies and activities.
- Consider linking with an existing organization, such as a citizens' association, community development office, tenants' association, housing authority.
- Canvas door-to-door to recruit members.
- Involve everyone-young and old, single and married, renter and homeowner.

- Gain support from the police or sheriffs' office. This is critical to a Watch group's credibility. These agencies are the major sources of information on local crime patterns, home security, other crime prevention education, and crime reporting.
- Get the information out quickly. Share all kinds of news-quash rumors.
- Gather the facts about crime in your neighborhood. Check police reports, do victimization surveys, and learn residents' perceptions about crime. Often residents' opinions are not supported by facts, and accurate information can reduce fear of crime.
- Physical conditions like abandoned cars or overgrown vacant lots contribute to crime. Sponsor cleanups, encourage residents to beautify the area, and ask them to turn on outdoor lights at night.