

# Take a Stand Against Crime: Join a Neighborhood Watch

## A Neighborhood Watch Primer

Neighborhood Watch, Block Watch, Town Watch, Building Watch, Crime Watch, whatever the name, it's one of the most effective and least costly ways to prevent crime and reduce fear. Neighborhood Watch fights the isolation that crime both creates and feeds upon. It forges bonds among area residents, helps reduce burglaries and robberies, and improves relations between police and the communities they serve.

## Why Neighborhood Watch?

- It works. Throughout the country, dramatic decreases in burglary and related offenses are reported by law enforcement professionals in communities with active Watch programs.
- Today's transient society produces communities that are less personal. Many families have two working parents and children involved in many activities that keep them away from home. An empty house in a neighborhood where none of the neighbors know the owner is a prime target for burglary.
- Neighborhood Watch also helps build pride and serves as a springboard for efforts that address other community concerns such as recreation for youth, child care, and affordable housing.

## How does a Neighborhood Watch start?

A motivated individual, a few concerned residents, a community organization, or a law enforcement agency can spearhead the efforts to establish a Watch. Together they:

- Organize a small planning committee of neighbors to discuss needs, the level of interest, and possible community problems.
- Contact the local police or sheriffs' department, or local crime prevention organization, for help in training members in home security and reporting skills and for information on local crime patterns.
- Hold an initial meeting to gauge neighbors interest; establish the purpose of the program; and begin to identify issues that need to be addressed.
- Select a coordinator.
- Ask for block captain volunteers who are responsible for relaying information to members.
- Recruit members, keeping up-to-date information on new residents and making special efforts to involve the elderly, working parents, and young people.
- Work with local government or law enforcement to put up Neighborhood Watch signs, usually after at least 50 percent of all households are enrolled.

## Who can be involved?

Any community resident can join - young and old, single and married, renter and homeowner. Even the busiest of people can belong to a Neighborhood Watch -they too can keep an eye out for neighbors as they come and go.

## **I live in an apartment building. Can I start a Neighborhood Watch?**

Yes, Watch Groups can be formed around any geographical unit: a block, apartment building, townhouse complex, park, business area, public housing complex, office building, or marina.

## **What does a Neighborhood Watch do?**

- A Neighborhood Watch is neighbors helping neighbors. They are extra eyes and ears for reporting crime and helping neighbors.
- Members meet their neighbors, learn how to make their homes more secure, watch out for each other and the neighborhood, and report activities that raise their suspicions to the police or sheriffs' office.
- Mark valuable property with an identifying number (Operation I.D.) to discourage theft and help law enforcement agencies identify and return stolen property.

## **What are the major components of a Watch Program?**

- Meetings. These should be set up on a regular basis such as bi-monthly, monthly, or six times a year.
- Citizens' or community patrol. A citizens' patrol is made up of volunteers who walk or drive through the community and alert police to crime and questionable activities. Not all neighborhood watches need a citizens' patrol.
- Communications. These can be as simple as a weekly flier posted on community announcement boards to a monthly newsletter that updates neighbors on the progress of the program to a neighborhood electronic bulletin board.