

# Neighborhood Watch

## WHAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH?

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program that:

- 1) Teaches citizens techniques to reduce the risk of being victimized at home and in public.
- 2) Trains citizens on the importance of recognizing suspicious activities and how to report them.
- 3) Teaches participants how to make their homes more secure and properly identify their property.
- 4) Allows neighbors to get to know each other and their routines so that any out of place activity can be reported and investigated.
- 5) A cohesive body of concerned citizens addressing issues that concern their neighborhood and the entire community.



## WHAT NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH IS NOT

- 1) A vigilante force working outside the normal procedures of law enforcement.
- 2) A program designed for participants to take personal risks to prevent crime.
- 3) A 100% guarantee that crime will not occur in your neighborhood.

## BENEFITS OF NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Comprehensive neighborhoods watch program in your neighborhood, whether it is a high crime area or not, will have many rewards to you and your family.

Neighborhood Watch programs are known to instill a greater sense of security, well-being, and reduce the fear of crime in your neighborhood and community as well as a greater "sense of community" and put the "neighbor" back in "neighborhood". Neighborhood watch also brings law enforcement and the community together as a team to reduce crime in your area.

### Some of the other benefits of Neighborhood Watch are:

Reducing the risk of being a crime victim. The risk is reduced because participants are taught how to take preventive measures that substantially decrease the likelihood of becoming a crime victim. Law enforcement agencies report that not only does a Neighborhood Watch reduce the risk of your home being burglarized, the instances of other crimes such as vandalism, personal assault, and fraud also decrease.

Being better prepared to respond to a suspicious activity. Part of the Neighborhood Watch program is training on how to report suspicious activities occurring in your neighborhood and what law enforcement officers need when a crime is being reported and why.

Greater access to criminal activity information. Neighborhood Watch programs are designed to keep participants informed of crime trends and patterns so they will be better prepared to spot any crime activity and stop it in their neighborhood. Neighborhood Watch gives the police added "eyes" and "ears", and encourages citizens to come forward as witnesses. Receiving a Neighborhood Watch sign to post in your neighborhood. Criminals know that if a neighborhood has a Neighborhood Watch sign posted, that neighborhood is not as easy target. They have taken the necessary steps to deter crime in their neighborhood and are probably being observed. Convicted burglars have reported avoiding neighborhoods that have neighborhoods that have neighborhood watch signs posted.

Knowing your neighbors. Neighborhood Watch promotes getting to know your neighbors and their regular patterns so that each of you will be able to report any activity that doesn't fit with regular



schedules. This means that when you're away, you can feel more secure about your property. This also instills more sense of community and puts the "neighbor" back into "neighborhood".

Reducing the fear of crime and making your neighborhood more livable. Neighborhood Watch increases the number of arrests and convictions by serving as a network for law enforcement and the community to communicate effectively about crime activities in their community.

Allowing other issues of concern to the community as a whole to be addressed. Once crime has been addressed and the fear of crime has been reduced, neighborhood watch participants can move on to address other issues that concern the community as a whole – or whatever the group feels is a need to address.

### INITIATING NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

1) The first thing is to visit your neighbors and explain that you are interested in starting a neighborhood watch group. Most people will give you a verbal commitment to participate right at the door. Others may not know anything about neighborhood watch and may need more information. An informational brochure, available from the Community Services Unit, will help explain the Neighborhood Watch concept. Still others won't talk to you; they don't want to be bothered. Inform those neighbors wishing to participate that you will be getting back in touch with them with an invitation to the first meeting. How many households should you contact? The boundaries for the proposed watch group can be worked out between you and the Community Services Unit representative before you start contacting neighbors. The average size of a watch group is about 20-25 households. NOTE: A favorable response from a least 50% of the households contacted is the goal.

2) Re-contact the representative from the Community Services Unit with the results of your initial neighbor contact. Together, you and the Community Services Unit representative will work out a date, time and location for the first meeting.

3) Once a date, time and location have been set, meeting invitations can be distributed to those neighbors wishing to participate. Invitations should be prepared and distributed so that neighbors are

given from 10 days to two weeks to prepare for the meeting (e.g. baby sitter, work schedule, other meetings, etc.)

4) Your invitation list should include your alderman. If there are any apartment buildings in your neighborhood, invite the landlords. Because you are doing the inviting, you can be somewhat selective in who you approach to invite. Quite often, people within the watch boundaries are the crime problem. You do not have to invite them to come. They probably would not come anyway.

5) In order to make your initial meeting more comfortable and inviting, arrange for refreshments to be served.

### BLOCK CAPTAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

Block Captain is the title given to the person or persons who volunteer to assist in the administrative duties of the watch group. Responsibilities include:

1) Distributing information, such as a quarterly newsletter or update material they receive from the Community Services representative to members of the watch group.

2) Keeping the block map up-to-date, with current names, addresses and phone numbers of people in the block watch program.

3) Scheduling the watch meetings and any emergency meetings.

4) Along with any volunteers, greeting new neighbors that move into the neighborhood, providing them with neighborhood watch material and updating the watch list.

The position of Block Captain should be a shared responsibility between two or more people. This is done so that if one individual cannot be present for a training or activity, someone else is available to get the job done. This helps neighbors to learn to work together as a team and become better acquainted, thereby promoting more of a sense of "neighborhood". Everyone in the watch group has equal status and should not expect someone with the title of Block Captain to do all the work. The same is true with reporting crime. Neighbors should not expect a Block Captain to do their reporting for them, nor should a Block Captain offer to report should a neighbor choose not to get involved.

### PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

1) Learning neighbor's names and being able to recognize them and their vehicles without any hesitation.

2) Keeping and maintaining a personal block map with the names and phone numbers of other watch group members.

3) Attending all watch meetings.

4) Implementing all security measures suggested by law enforcement and having a security survey completed on your home. Reviewing the neighborhood watch pamphlets and crime prevention literature.

5) Following the guidelines suggested in Operation ID.

- 6) Keeping an eye on neighbors' homes and reporting any suspicious activities to local law enforcement and to your neighbors.
- 7) Writing down descriptions of any suspicious-looking persons or vehicles and reporting them to the police and to your neighbors.
- 8) Sharing crime prevention information with other family members and your children.
- 9) Not taking any risks to prevent a crime or taking matters into your own hands, forgoing any police intervention. Neighborhood Watch is not about you taking police action, It's about being a good neighbor.
- 10) Cooperating with and assisting the Block Captain with any administrative duties of the watch group.
- 11) Be willing to serve as an acting Block Captain as needs arise, or volunteer for the position should the existing Block Captain not be able to fulfill their obligation.

### KNOWING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Why should you know you neighborhood?

Getting to know your neighbors, their families, their habits, the cars they drive, their phone numbers both at home and at work, any medical problems they may have, and what kind of pets they may have is probably one of the most important aspects of a successful Neighborhood Watch program.

Knowing these aspects of your neighbor's lives will allow you to respond accurately and quickly to any emergency situation, and may thereby prevent a crime or save a life.

### The Block Map

The Block Map gives you a visual perspective of your neighborhood. It is an easy reference for who lives in your neighborhood and is used to explain the layout of your block or street when reporting an emergency situation to 911 or a police dispatcher.

The block map is prepared by the Community Services Unit representative and is distributed after the fourth meeting of the watch group. The block map shows all of the houses within the boundaries of the watch group. It will show the name, address and phone number of participating neighbors and the house number only of any non-participants.

### MEETING TOPICS

The first meeting with your group is only the beginning. Meeting together on a regular basis to receive training on other topics allows participants to become better acquainted with each other. It also educates the neighborhood about other subjects that may be a concern to the group.

By-laws established by The Alton Neighborhood Watch Association require that before a neighborhood can achieve watch group status, members must attend a mandatory 4 meetings, and maintain an attendance rate of 50% of the number of families within the watch groups' boundaries.

Meeting #1 is often called the organizational meeting. A workable definition of neighborhood watch is given along with the objectives of neighborhood watch. The history of the watch concept is reviewed and the responsibilities of the watch members are discussed. Discussion will turn to local crime

problems and how the watch concept can address them. Neighbors are shown the watch sign that will eventually be posted in their neighborhood. Block captains are appointed. The 4-meeting requirement is explained.

Meeting #2 is a detailed training and discussion on residential burglary prevention. Discussion focuses on who the burglar is and how he operates. Handouts show various security hardware, prevention tips, information on security lighting and alarms. There is also a discussion on security surveys.

Meeting #3 is a discussion on identifying and reporting suspicious activity. Emphasis is on observation skills and reporting skills. Specific discussion on 9-1-1. Explanation of the police department police and procedure on responding to and answering calls for service. A 30 minute video presentation on suspicious activity is also shown.

Meeting #4 discusses the importance of documenting serial numbers, engraving identifying numbers on our merchandise, photographing and videotaping our possessions. Inventory booklets distributed. This meeting also ties together the previous topics and closes out the 4-meeting requirement for watch group status.

Though only four meetings are required in the organizational set-up of the watch group, Alton Neighborhood Watch Association by-laws require that watch groups meet at least twice a year as a way to maintain the group. Topic suggestions for continuing neighborhood watch meetings are: personal safety, fraud and con game awareness, gang awareness, child safety, gun safety, CPR and first aid, travel safety, vandalism prevention, etc...

### SIGN POSTING

Watch group status is not automatic. In order to achieve Watch Group status and have signs posted in the neighborhood, neighbors must attend the four required meetings and the group must maintain at least a 50% attendance rate.

These 12" x 18" aluminum watch signs are provided free to those neighborhood watch groups who have achieved watch group status. The signs, erected on public streets by the Alton Public Works

Department, remain the property of the City of Alton. Occasionally, watch signs are awarded to private agencies such as schools and churches hosting or sponsoring a watch group. Sign posting then becomes the responsibility of that agency or group.

### MAINTAINING YOUR WATCH GROUP

As an established neighborhood watch group, there are a number of activities that can be undertaken to promote continued participation in neighborhood watch. When a neighborhood works together to help take care of its residents, a safer and more cohesive neighborhood is created. The amount of crime in the neighborhood will decrease and a greater sense of security and well-being will be felt by all the neighbors.

Here are some ideas for keeping your neighborhood watch group active and communicating:

1. Community newsletter.
2. Community ride sharing.

3. Clean-up, fix-up activities.
4. Welcoming committee for new neighbors.
5. Organized assistance for neighborhood senior citizens, disabled neighbors or shut-ins.
6. Voter registration drives.
7. Various social activities such as block parties, Halloween parties for neighborhood children, etc...
8. Emergency planning for neighborhoods.