



# What is a Neighborhood Watch?

Neighborhood Watch, also known as Citizen Crime Watch, Block Watch, or Home Alert, is a voluntary program organized by concerned citizens to reduce crime in their communities. Working with local law enforcement agencies, citizens can learn when and how to report suspicious activities, assist in property identification, conduct home security surveys and implement home security measures and precautions.

Neighborhood Watch meetings offer valuable information that helps neighbors cooperate effectively with one another. It also promotes good security practices, makes more observant and caring neighbors, and boosts cooperation between citizens and law enforcement.

The difficulty is in sustaining these programs. The following is a list of common traits that successful Neighborhood Watch programs share:

- People feel a sense of ownership with the program. They have invested their time and energy in it and it belongs to them.
- Law enforcement is seen as an indispensable guiding force.
- Citizens see the program as their own responsibility. They choose to get involved in all stages of planning, from implementation and evaluation to maintenance.
- The program addresses the local concerns of the citizens such as domestic violence, abandoned cars, vacant lots filled with trash, day care, drugs and gang activity.



## Reluctance and Fear

Many people are afraid to fight back against crime for fear of retaliation by gangs or other criminals. There are also those that either don't care or think that they can't make a difference. However, there are some ways to overcome these kinds of roadblocks.

**First**, realize that there is strength in numbers. An organization of people who join together can show their commitment without having to be singled out.

**Second**, coordinate with local law officials to organize a system that will allow anonymous reporting of crimes.

**Third**, meetings can be conducted away from the problem area so that your privacy can be protected.

**Lastly**, take control over the situation and find the most comfortable starting place for everyone involved.

Fear of crime can hinder participation and deprive you of volunteers. Accurate information can dispel rumors and aid in getting people's fears under control.

Small, early successes can eliminate fears and give everyone the confidence they need to move forward.

# Anyone Can Join a Neighborhood Watch



## Don't Wait Until It's Too Late



Whether you live in a quiet neighborhood, or in a rural town with a stable history, you can still be at risk for facing a crime threat.

Early detection is the best way to prevent the onset of bigger problems. It's a good idea to get into action at the first sight of trouble. A rash of break-ins, people loitering, graffiti and abandoned autos are all possible clues that could lead to trouble.

Paying attention to the small problems ahead of time, can save you from having to face larger and more difficult ones down the road.

Any resident of a community can join a Neighborhood Watch, even those who do not own a home can get involved. A Neighborhood Watch can be in an apartment community, town-house complex, office building or a marina.

There are many ways people can come together to help make their communities a safer place to reside in.

### GETTING ORGANIZED

Once a group of people decide to start a Neighborhood Watch, they should consider the following:

- Contact law enforcement officials who can aid in training members in home security, reporting techniques and for criteria on local crime patterns.
- Select a coordinator and block captains who will be responsible for relaying information to members and for organizing meetings.
- Have someone responsible for recruiting new people and keeping current status on new members. Special efforts should be made to involve all people including the elderly, working parents and young people.
- Work with the local law enforcement and government to have Neighborhood Watch signs put up. This can usually be done after at least 50% of households are signed up.

# Advice From the Experienced

Experience is the greatest teacher. Here are some pointers from people who have run their own Neighborhood Watch activities:

- **Keep things simple:** Stick to the quickest and most obvious route to get things done.
- **Get as many people involved as possible:** People will often volunteer if asked, and more may come along with each person asked.
- **Follow through:** Keep all promises that are made. If an official promises something, then stay on it and go higher up if necessary.
- **Start with success:** A quick and easy goal is a good way to boost confidence and interest in taking on tougher problems.
- **Say thanks:** Congratulate each other for any progress made. Taking before and after pictures is a good way of seeing results from your efforts. Be sure to acknowledge officials and other groups that have helped out.
- **Build leaders:** One volunteer "leader" should not be permanent. One person who is always in control is bad for the group and the leader. The Neighborhood Watch is a group effort and a good way to make use of everyone's unique talents.
- **Build links:** Focus on concerns that local government and officials are working on. Establishing trust can lead to strong partnerships that will help your neighborhood.
- **Keep in touch regularly, clearly and in different formats:** Frequent, concise communication helps people stay informed so that people stay involved. Put out a newsletter, use local media or start a telephone network of members working to stay in touch.
- **Check your progress:** Be sure you know what your goals are and where you are going. Set up check points along the way and evaluate whether or not you're headed in the right direction.

## Low-Cost Resources

Preventing crime doesn't mean that you have to dig into your own pockets. Four out of five Neighborhood Watches rely on volunteers. These no-cost (or low-cost) programs work very well and residents say their communities are safer than the ones without a Watch.

Even when you have a project that requires skills and resources that you think may cost money—take a closer look at your volunteers. Someone may be able to help. There is always the possibility that you could trade services to get the job done, too.

If you do have something that is going to require a lot of cash, research your local foundations and corporations. They frequently donate special funds to local groups. Also check with community action departments like drug prevention, public safety, public housing, or economic development.

In addition, your local library will have information on funding resources in your community. A program such as VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) may offer "free" staff.

