



## 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



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, townhouse 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.

## 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.