

CRIME WATCH MANUAL

V1.2.1

**For crimes in progress
or life threatening situations,
call 9-1-1 immediately**

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PURPOSE

To standardize Crime Watch information presented during community crime prevention meetings. The information is designed to assist personnel conducting Crime Watch meetings, to impart basic crime prevention techniques to help communities enjoy a greater degree of safety and security.

INTRODUCTION

Crime Watch programs are the most effective means available for keeping crime out of communities. It relies on the best crime fighting tool ever invented, i.e., a good neighbor. Fortunately, good neighbors are found everywhere. They live in houses, apartment buildings, urban, suburban and rural areas.

The Crime Watch Program unites the trained law enforcement with local organizations and individual residents in a community-wide effort to reduce residential crime. Communities working together are a formidable crime fighting team. Be a good neighbor and make your community safer by starting a Crime Watch Program.

WHAT IS CRIME WATCH?

Crime Watch is a crime prevention program enlisting the active participation of residents in cooperation with local law enforcement to reduce crime and fear of crime in their communities. It involves neighbors getting to know each other to develop a program of mutual assistance. It involves neighbors being educated in crime reporting and suspect identification techniques. Finally, it involves neighbors using crime prevention strategies as tools to reduce crime in their communities.

WHY IS A CRIME WATCH NEEDED?

The community has the primary responsibility for fighting crime. The most effective approach to fighting crime is a proactive one, i.e., stopping it before it occurs. This can happen when neighbors cooperate with each other to assist local law enforcement. Crime Watch members place stickers in their windows and post Crime Watch signs on streets, warning criminals they are in an active Crime Watch community, and that "neighbors are watching out for each other."

Remember, you and your neighbors are the ones who really know what is going on in your community and there can't be a local law enforcement officer on every corner. Resident involvement is essential to combat crime.

HOW DO I START A CRIME WATCH PROGRAM?

Local law enforcement will assist in starting a program in your community. A law enforcement Community Action Team (CAT) representative will be available for your first meeting to assist with the initial organization of the Crime Watch Program and discuss crime concerns specific to your community. Contact local law enforcement to get started. Talk to your neighbors. Are they interested? Do they understand the value of a Crime Watch Program? Are they aware of, or concerned about specific crime problems in your area? If they are, be sure to mention the following:

- Crime Watch is a community partnership to assist local law enforcement in the reduction and fear of crime
- Crime Watch does not require frequent meetings
- Crime Watch does not ask anyone to take personal risks to prevent crime
- A law enforcement CAT personnel will attend your meetings to answer questions about crime and provide information about police procedures.
- Arrange a date, time and place for the first meeting.
- Set the meeting date far enough in advance to give everyone adequate notice.
- Make sure the time is convenient for your neighbors as well as the law enforcement CAT representative that will be attending.

- Distribute a flyer announcing the meeting and remind everyone a few days before to assure his or her attendance. If you are anticipating a small group, have the meeting at one of the houses in the community. The location should make everyone feel comfortable. Everyone may not attend, and that's okay. The program can still be successful.
- Hold the first meeting
- Distribute nametags
- Make opening remarks
- Provide simple refreshments to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Ask the law enforcement CAT representative to cover the following topics:

- Crime prevention programs
- The main purpose of the Crime Watch Program
- Specific crime problems in the community
- Effective crime prevention techniques
- How residents can become the "eyes and ears" and assist them with criminal investigations
- How to report a crime and what to look for when providing a description.

Select a Coordinator. The role of the Coordinator is to:

- Oversee and arrange Crime Watch meetings.
- Be a spokesperson for the group.
- Serve as a liaison between the law enforcement CAT representative and the Crime Watch group.
- Recruit neighbors to share the responsibility of hosting meetings.
- Maintain a list of all members.
- Designate work assignments such as enrolling new members, vacation home watch, block parents, crime patrol, fund-raising, secretarial duties, developing and maintaining block maps and crime prevention material distribution.
- Remind members to call law enforcement with concerns.

Develop and distribute maps

- A map will help members give law enforcement precise information when reporting suspicious activity in your community. Your map should:
- Identify the Coordinator
- Clearly identify streets, cross streets and compass points
- Provide the name, address, and telephone numbers of each home and identify the ones with burglar alarms
- Identify seniors and/or neighbors with health or mobility problems who may need special attention
- List the make, model and license plate numbers of vehicles at each home. Help neighbors by letting them know which vehicles belong there during daytime hours
- Include non-emergency telephone numbers for police or sheriff's department, fire, ambulance, and highway department
- Include numbers for the law enforcement CAT representative

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- Update and reissue maps when any information changes.

Gather and share information

- Knowing more about your neighbors, their vehicles and their daily routines will help you recognize unusual or suspicious activities. Consider exchanging the following types of basic

information with your neighbors:

- Home and work telephone numbers
- Names, ages and number of family members or residents
- Work hours
- School or day-care hours of children
- Who owns a dog
- Planned vacations or visitors
- Scheduled deliveries or repairs

MAINTAINING THE PROGRAM

After your Crime Watch is established, be sure everyone understands and observes the following guidelines:

- Be alert to unusual or suspicious behavior in your community. Call law enforcement if necessary. Write down descriptions of suspicious person(s) and license numbers
- Tell a trusted neighbor if your house will be unoccupied for an extended period. Tell him or her how to reach you in an emergency
- Look after your neighbor's homes when they are away and ask them to look after yours. This includes picking up mail, newspapers and storing trash cans or recycling bins. Don't send a message that says, "No One Is Home"
- Attend Crime Watch meetings often. The law enforcement CAT representative will speak to you about local crime trends and what you can do about them
- Above all, stay involved. It is the most effective way to reduce or prevent crime and make your community safe and remember your job is to report crime. The responsibility for apprehending criminals belongs to the police.

REPORTING CRIME

Eyewitness information is the key to solving many crimes. The following tips will assist you when reporting crime. Call immediately. A five-minute delay can reduce the chance of catching criminals. Tell the law enforcement representative as much as you can. No fact is too trivial. In many cases, what victims and witnesses tell the police about the criminal that results in an arrest.

You may be asked the following when reporting a crime:

- Who, What, When, and Where?
- How many suspects were there?
- Can you describe the suspect(s)?
- Can you describe their vehicle(s)?
- What was/were the license plate number(s)?
- What did they do?
- What did they say?
- What did they take?
- Which way did they go?

Due to limited resources and personnel or a heavy emergency call load, law enforcement may not be able to respond immediately. They have to prioritize their responses based on apparent danger to human life. Don't be discouraged. They will get to you as soon as possible. Do not attempt to stop or detain the suspect(s) yourself.

WHAT IS SUSPICIOUS?

Anything that seems even slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day or night

could be criminal activity. The following are some obvious things to watch for:

- A stranger entering your neighbor's house when it is unoccupied. A scream heard anywhere might mean robbery or assault
- Offers of merchandise at ridiculously low prices may mean stolen property
- Anyone removing accessories, license plates, or gas from a vehicle should be reported
- Anyone peering into parked vehicles may be looking for a vehicle to steal or for valuables left in the vehicle
- Persons entering or leaving a place of business after hours
- A sound of breaking glass or loud explosive noises could mean an accident, burglary or vandalism
- Persons loitering around schools, parks and secluded areas could be sex offenders
- Persons loitering in the community who do not live there; and
- Anyone forcing entry to, or tampering with a residence, business, or vehicle should be reported.

THE NOT SO OBVIOUS

- Strangers and solicitors
- Verify the employment of all solicitors, meter readers and repair personnel prior to allowing them entry into your home. This can be done by obtaining the employer's number from the telephone book or by contacting directory assistance. Never take a telephone number offered by a suspicious person. Be suspicious of alleged delivery personnel with a wrong address or asking if someone lives there.
- Someone carrying property
- If it's at an unusual hour, unusual place, or if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased.
- Someone going door-to-door in your community
- Watch for a while. If after a few houses are visited, one or more persons tries a door to see if it is locked, looks into windows, or goes into a back or side yard, it could be a burglar. Call law enforcement immediately, don't wait for the person to leave. Traffic to and from a certain residence.
- It is not suspicious unless it occurs on a daily basis or very, regular basis, especially during late or unusual hours. But any vehicle moving slowly and without lights, or following a course that appears aimless or repetitive in any location is, particularly in areas of schools, parks and playgrounds. Occupants may be looking for places to rob or burglarize, or they could be drug pushers or sex offenders
- Parked vehicles containing one or more persons
- If it is an unusual hour they could be lookouts for a burglary in progress. An abandoned vehicle parked on your block may be a stolen vehicle.
- Continuous repair operations at non-business locations
- It could mean stolen property is being stripped, repainted, or otherwise altered.
- Persons making a quick change of vehicles
- May be attempting to elude the police or abandoning a stolen vehicle.
- Any person taking a shortcut through a backyard
- One or more juveniles walking through the community looking into automobiles or backyards could lead to a crime.

Once you have reported the crime, stick with it. It pays to prosecute. Many criminals who are arrested for property crimes are convicted. Being a witness in court is not as much trouble as you think. For victim/witness assistance, call the law enforcement CAT representative.

ACTION PLANNING

After completing the presentation, have the group designate who the Coordinator will be. The Coordinator can designate individuals to take charge of the responsibilities concerning the Crime Watch group.

Additionally, the group can work together with the law enforcement CAT representative in creating an action plan, a personal property inventory list and a suspect/vehicle description form.

CONCLUSION

The key to keeping a Crime Watch group active is maintaining interest over time. By getting everyone involved you will create a feeling of pride and the atmosphere of a small town, even if you live in a large city. Crime Watch can easily be adapted to meet your needs, wherever you live or work. Active Crime Watch groups can make changes, through their local officials, such as improving street lighting, increasing extra patrol and changing traffic flow patterns. Active apartment or multi-family dwelling Crime Watch groups can make changes by working closely with their landlords or building managers. They can work together to improve lighting and security of individual units as well as communal areas and develop new policies or practices to improve building or property security. Make belonging to your Crime Watch group enjoyable. People will get involved and remain interested if the programs are fun as well as meaningful. Use your imagination. Schedule potluck dinners, organize cleanup campaigns or hold block parties. The possibilities are endless when neighbors unite and work together.

This manual was created by the Richland County (SC) Sheriff's Department Community Action Team. It has been adapted to be used by Crime Watches in areas that are not served by the Richland County Sheriff's Department and their Community Action Team.