



NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH TRAINING MANUAL

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WHAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH?

Crime, or the fear of crime, provides the impetus for the citizens to become better informed on how to protect themselves and their property.

Getting back to the old adage of being our “brother’s keepers”, neighbors watching out for other neighbors. Neighbors are asked to be the eyes and ears in helping the police in apprehending criminals. Crime Watch is not designed to substitute for police protection, rather it is an extension or supplement in assisting the police in making neighborhoods safer for all citizens.

Neighborhood Watch operates under two principles. Neighbors getting to know and watch out for each other and watching out for each other’s property as though it was their own. Neighborhood Watch helps create an identity within the neighborhood which in turn fosters a sense of pride and belonging for the participants.

The participants make their neighborhood a safer place to live by adopting a more observant and active attitude and as a result become more aware of strange cars, persons, or circumstances. This will not take a lot of time and soon will develop into a daily habit of becoming more aware of what is going on in the neighborhood.

YOUR ROLE AS A CRIME WATCHER

Your first and most important duty is to be an active and responsible watcher in your neighborhood.

The prevention of crime in your community is a shared responsibility between law enforcement and private citizens.

No number of officers or patrol cars can completely combat the problem alone.

It is absolutely essential that a concerned citizen join hands with law enforcement in an active joint campaign to reduce residential crime.

This is where Crime Watch enters the picture. Your role as a crime watcher is to be an extra set of eyes and ears in your neighborhood.

Very simply, Crime Watch involves:

- Neighbors getting to know each other and working together in a program of mutual assistance.

- Neighbors being trained to be more alert in reporting suspicious activity.

- Implementation of other crime deterrents such as participation in the Operation Identification property marking program, other basic home security measures, and improved personal habits.

The citizens of your community can play a major role in the reduction of residential crime through active Neighborhood Crime Watch.

Unlocked doors, open windows, and poorly lit areas provide some of the opportunity that residential criminals look for.

The elimination of that opportunity, coupled with the active reporting of suspicious activity, provides the foundation for crime watch in your community. This, in turn, makes your neighborhood a place to live.

CRIME WATCH PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES

Participation in Crime Watch is not something that takes a lot of time. It does require each person to adopt a more observant and active attitude on a daily basis.

As a result, neighbors will get to know each other better and will become more aware of strange cars, persons or circumstances which might require calling the police.

What participants do to make their homes more secure and how alert they become is entirely up to them. The more prepared individuals are, the more effective they will be as a weapon against crime.

- Get to know the neighbors. Know their names and be able to identify them and their vehicles by sight.
- Maintain a map of the immediate neighborhood with names and address.
- Makes the home as unattractive to a burglar as possible.
- Photograph and record all valuable property so it can be easily identified in the case of a burglary.
- Be observant and watch over the neighbors' homes, especially when that are not at home or out of town.
- Write down license plate numbers and descriptions of suspicious-looking vehicles and persons in the neighborhood and report them to the police immediately.
- Report information that may be helpful in solving a crime to the sheriff's office.
- Educate children in crime prevention and teach respect and friendship for law enforcement and police officials.
- If you have a security surveillance system please consider registering it as part of the CAPTURE program.

FACT VS. MYTH

MYTH: Neighborhood Watch areas do not work.

FACT: Working programs reduce crime as much as 80%. Criminals have said that the Neighborhood Watch programs scare them into other neighborhoods.

MYTH: Neighborhood Watch areas are nothing more than a clique.

FACT: Neighborhood Watch groups are for everyone in the block or area, and everyone gets to take part.

MYTH: To be a part of a Neighborhood Watch group, I would have to dropout of something else.

FACT: Neighborhood watch takes a very little of your time. All you need to do is watch what is going on, report suspicious activity that you see in your area, and attend any neighborhood meetings.

MYTH: The Sheriff's Office runs your Neighborhood Watch program.

FACT: Your Neighborhood Watch program belongs to your area. The Sheriff's Office will help to start your program and after that, it belongs to you. The Sheriff's Office will assist, but you will be the voice in your program.

ADDITIONAL FACTS ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME WATCH

Burglaries, auto thefts, rape, child abductions, and arson are the most prevalent crimes.

Household burglary is one of the easiest crimes to commit and prevent...but one of the hardest to solve.

More than half of police time is spent on investigating burglaries.

Statistics show that in more than half of household burglaries, forced entry is not involved.

A majority of household burglaries occur during daylight hours.

Household burglary has a high potential for deaths or injury, where a burglar is surprised by the property owner.

HELP CATCH A CRIMINAL

No criminal wants to be caught. But if you see or hear someone breaking the law, try to remember what they look like and quickly report them to law enforcement.

The most valuable aid you can give a sheriff's deputy about a crime is information on the identification of suspects. This, and the facts you observe about the crime itself, are the two main points on which an officer bases their investigation. These two items can, in many cases, be far more important than the findings made through scientific investigation at the scene such as finger prints, foot casts, etc. Many times such evidence is non-existent. Be sure to make written note of as many of the following as possible. When reporting a crime or suspicious activity do not hang up the telephone until you are sure the dispatcher has all the information.

DESCRIBE THE PERSON(S)

- Gender
- Race
- Age
- Height
- Weight
- Hair Color/Style
- Hat
- Glasses
- Shirt
- Pants
- Shoes
- Scars
- Tattoos

DESCRIBE THE VEHICLE

- Make
- Model
- Color
- Style
- License Plate Number
- Year
- Identifying Marks
- Direction of Travel

REPORTING AND PURPOSE OF REPORTING

The purpose for reporting suspicious activity to the sheriff's office is to stop the criminal activity, increase deputy presence in your neighborhood and give a true prospective of crime. Making a report will enhance the possibility of getting your property returned.

Anything that seems slightly "out of place" or does not look right could be criminal activity. Call the Sheriff's Office immediately about all suspicious activity. Do not worry about "bothering" the sheriff's office or being embarrassed if your suspicions are proved to be unfounded. Think ahead about what could happen if you don't act. Give the dispatcher:

- The reason for the call
- The location of the activity
- A description of the subject and any vehicle involved
- If the crime is in progress, give the circumstances and possible crime being committed.

WHEN IN DOUBT, CALL IT IN

Under no circumstances should you attempt to apprehend a person committing a crime or investigate suspicious activity. The sheriff's office needs your information, not your action.

The Sheriff's Office would rather investigate than be called when it is too late. Your call could save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a criminal act. Be alert.

Not every stranger who comes into your neighborhood is a criminal by any means. There are many solicitors, repairmen, and servicemen moving around our neighborhoods all the time. But criminals do take advantage of this by pretending to be legitimate workers.

HOME SECURITY

In an emergency, can sheriff's deputies, the fire department, or ambulance find your home quickly and easily from the street or other entrance way?

Permanent placement of numbers, which are no less than 2" in height, on the front of a residence or entrance to the driveway designating the official post office address, is recommended.

Can a prowler, burglar, or vandal hide in the shadows of the night around your home?

One of the best sources of cost effective protection around your home is adequate exterior lighting. Lighting has been proven to be an effective deterrent against persons with criminal intent.



Effective lighting should be:



1. Placed to illuminate as many sides of the house as possible
2. Placed under the eaves of the house or shielded with a protective covering to prevent tampering
3. Kept on during all nighttime periods (unless utilizing motion sensors)

An inexpensive timer can be used to turn lights on at dusk and off at dawn.

What about your bushes and landscaping? Could a potential criminal hide there?

The security of your home also depends on visibility. Your home should maintain its visibility so that neighbors and sheriff's deputies can watch for illegal activity. Ornamental plant growth should be kept well-trimmed, especially around doors and windows where a person could hide while breaking into your home.

In planning your landscape, you might consider discouraging intruders from window areas by planting prickly or thorn bearing plants.

Do you have a privacy fence that obstructs your neighbors' view of your backyard? Are your fence cross rails on the outside presenting a stepladder type entry into your backyard? What about your gate, is it secured?



Privacy fencing is a disadvantage to home security since it provides ample concealment. Other forms of fencing would eliminate this disadvantage but here are some methods to offset this problem:



1. Remove every other slat on the fence to increase visibility.
2. Plant a hostile-type plant to cover the outside of the fence.
3. Padlock your gate so that entry is made more difficult.

If your fence has not been built, then have the installer place the cross rails on the inside of the fence.

NOW THAT WE HAVE COVERED THE EXTERIOR OF THE HOME, LETS TAKE A LOOK AT THE INTERIOR

Can people approaching the front door be seen from inside? Do you know who is outside before opening the door?

A good idea here is to install a wide angle viewer or video equipped doorbell camera. This will let you know who is on the outside before the door is open.

How strong is the door itself? Is it a solid core door? Is it metal? How thick is it? Is it cracking or splitting?

Not only your front door, but all of your exterior doors and the door from your garage to your house should be of solid core construction or heavy gauge metal. The doors should be a minimum of 1 3/8 inches thick. A thinner door may give if kicked. And if your door is the panel-type door, make sure the joints haven't come unglued and the panels are not split or rotten.



Along with the door we can look at the strike plate. Is your strike plate installed with short wood screws?

The recommendation is that you replace those short wood screws with wood screws with a minimum length of 3 inches. Better yet, you could install a heavier gauge security strike plate along with the longer screws. The new screws should go past the door frame and into the structural frame of the home.

Do you just have the lock-in-the-knob type lock? Is your latch spring loaded?

The lock-in-the-knob type lock can provide privacy and convenience, but it does not provide security from intruders. In fact, most lock-in-the-knob type locks can be slipped using a credit card or screwdriver. For safety you need a secure lock.

The recommended lock is a deadbolt lock with the following features:

- Single Cylinder Lock (for fire safety)
- Minimum of 1" bolt throw
- Rotating cylinder guard
- Five Pin tumbler
- Hardened Steel interlocking screws



Another consideration in doors is French or Double doors.

In a pair of double doors, to make them secure, one of the doors must be made inactive. This can be accomplished with the installation of flush bolts at the top and bottom of the door that are secured into metal strike plates. A deadbolt may then be added to the active door.

Other types of doors in the home must be adequately secured. Sliding glass doors particularly vulnerable to attacks by burglars.

Secure sliding doors can be reinforced by place a wooden or metal rod into the track when the door is shut to prevent it from being opened. The glass on the door can be reinforced with plastic window sheeting that can increase strength and prevent viewing from the exterior.



While you are checking doors take a look at the hinges. Are your hinges exposed to the outside of the home?

If you find that your hinges are exposed to the outside we recommend that you pin the hinges or replace them with non-removable hinge pins.

Now let's take a look at the windows. First, what type of windows do you have: are they aluminum frame? Wooden? Double hung? Single hung? Sliding? Casement or jalousie? Have you added any type of auxiliary locking mechanisms?

Because of yours windows' vulnerability, it is recommended that a supplementary lock be installed on all moving windows. Most windows slide vertically or horizontally and can be secured in several different ways.



Pinning a window hut reduces the chances that the window can be pried open. This is accomplished by drilling a hole at a slightly downward angle through both the movable and fixed window frame and placing a pin, nail, or eyebolt in the hole.

Remember to allow for easy removal from the inside for window use and fire safety.

Other methods include placing a tight fitting dowel in the track of the window or using a commercial thumb-screw lock in the track.

Now let's take a look in the garage. We've already discussed the point that the door from your house into the garage should be secured with a deadbolt lock and should be of the same construction as exterior doors. How about the garage door itself? Is it deteriorating and easily bypassed? Does it have windows? How about a garage door opener? Does the cord release for our garage door opener hang by the door when your door is closed?

Most garage doors, due to their construction, are difficult to secure. Several recommendations can be made however:

- Keep garage doors closed and locked at all times
- Remove any knob or ring from the end of the manual garage door release
- Cover any windows to prevent easy viewing from outside (reflective window film)
- While on vacation, place a padlock through the track



NOTE: WHEN GOING ON VACATION YOU CAN PLACE AN EXTRA PATROL REQUEST WITH THE COMAL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE FOR THE DURATION BY VISITING MYCOMALCOUNTY.COM/SO