

National Neighborhood Watch

A Division of the National Sheriffs' Association



History of Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch is one of the oldest and most well-known crime prevention concepts in North America. The program has roots dating back to the days of colonial settlements, when night watchmen patrolled the streets. In the late 1960s, Neighborhood Watch came to prominence due to an increase in crime rates. The National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) saw a need for a neighborhood crime prevention organization and created the National Neighborhood Watch Program in 1972 to assist citizens and law enforcement.

For the last four decades, the National Sheriffs' Association has helped neighbors band together to create Watch Groups. These groups understand that active participation of community residents is a critical element in neighborhood safety. Watch groups make their communities a better place to live simply by looking out for suspicious activity in their neighborhood and reporting that activity to law enforcement.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the need for strengthening and securing our communities has become more critical and, as a result, Neighborhood Watch groups have taken on greater significance. In addition to serving a crime prevention role, Neighborhood Watch can also be used as the basis for bringing neighborhood residents together to focus on disaster preparedness, emergency response, and terrorism awareness.

The national program changed with the transforming role of the Neighborhood Watch groups. That is why in 2002, the National Sheriffs' Association, with a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice launched USAonWatch.org.

In 2013, the funding from the grant came to an end and the National Sheriffs' Association absorbed USAonWatch into National Neighborhood Watch—A Division of the National Sheriffs' Association. National Neighborhood Watch is a membership based program in which citizens can join and gain access to resources to support, start, or re-vitalize their Neighborhood Watch groups.

The National Neighborhood Watch invites you to visit www.NNW.org to browse the site and take advantage of all that it has to offer. Check out the exclusive member benefits, subscribe to the newsletter, and register your Neighborhood Watch group—it only takes a minute! If you have already registered, thank you for contributing to the security of our homeland.



Building a Watch Group

Five Steps to Building a Successful Neighborhood Watch in Your Area

Neighborhood Watch began as a grassroots effort more than 40 years ago to protect homes from burglary. The importance of watch groups has risen in recent years due to its integral part in the nation's homeland strategy.

National Neighborhood Watch (NNW) encourages education and common sense as it strives to involve citizens in crime prevention and emergency preparedness. It teaches citizens how to help themselves by identifying and reporting suspicious activity in their community. Also, citizens have the opportunity to give back to their neighborhood by working together to make the community safer as well as improve the neighborhood's quality of life.

A Neighborhood Watch program is easy to start. All you need to do is have a meeting with your neighbors. Do not forget to invite a representative from your local law enforcement. Neighborhood Watch programs are built upon successful partnerships with law enforcement. Use the suggestions below to build an effective and successful Neighborhood Watch group.

Step 1

Talk with your fellow neighbors about their concerns regarding crime in the area and determine the level of interest others have in starting a Watch Group. While it may be hard to have every household involved, incorporating as many of your neighbors as possible will increase the likelihood for success in reducing crime.

Step 2

Contact your local law enforcement agency and invite them to meet with your group at a time and place convenient to your Watch Group members. It is essential for your group to work in collaboration with law enforcement. Neighborhood Watch is a collaborative effort. Law enforcement needs to let the citizens know what is expected of them, and Neighborhood Watch group members and citizens need to let law enforcement know what their concerns are within the community.

Step 3

Working with a law enforcement advisor, your Watch Group should identify patterns of crime in the area and develop strategies to address these problems. Your group will need to appoint a block captain to coordinate these efforts as well as design a phone tree for reporting crime and suspicious activities.

Step 4

Have law enforcement train your Watch Group members in terrorism awareness, emergency preparedness/emergency response, and basic crime prevention techniques.

Step 5

Take active steps in your community. Have a kickoff event to announce your formation and encourage others to get involved. Start a local Neighborhood Watch newsletter, schedule times for Watch members to conduct or attend citizen patrols, training, emergency drills, and crime prevention exercises.

It is important to keep your group active and enthusiastic. Maintaining communication between group members and your local law enforcement agency is important. Be sure to schedule regular meetings so that your group remains focused.

If all those involved in the Neighborhood Watch program are aiming for the same goal, the program will be successful. Please remember this is not an overnight process; it takes patience, planning, and dedication. Studies show that if a Neighborhood Watch program deteriorates, criminals notice and quickly resume illegal activities.

For additional resources please visit www.NNW.org or contact National Neighborhood Watch at nw@sheriffs.org.

Successful Partnerships

One of the foundations of National Neighborhood Watch is the local community partnerships created between the individuals and/or organizations. These partnerships share a common vision of keeping neighborhoods safe and secure. To ensure successful partnerships, Block Captains should remember communication, coordination, cooperation and collaboration techniques.

Communication – The agreement to share thoughts, ideas, and information. Communication need not require face-to-face interaction, but can be accomplished through letters, telephone calls, reports, social media or e-mail. Communication requires a message, a sender and a receiver.

Coordination – This is critical to creating and sustaining partnerships and citizen involvement. The amount or nature of interaction can cover a range of activities, such as arranging for Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) or helping to arrange an event.

Cooperation – This occurs when two or more communicating individuals or groups agree to help each other with a task or objective.

Collaboration – This is the most intense level of working together, and is based on a model of sharing power for attaining a common goal.

Partners

Watch programs seek to improve the safety and security of everyone in the community. Below are a few organizations that your group may want to partner with, in addition to a local law enforcement agency.

- Businesses
- Faith/Community-based organizations
- Communication companies
- Hospital and medical providers
- Local government
- Other neighborhood groups
- Citizen Corps Councils
- Emergency Management Agencies
- Civic associations
- Schools and day care centers
- Utility companies
- Volunteer emergency personnel

REMEMBER THE 4 C'S

Communication

Coordination

Cooperation

Collaboration

Effective Leadership

The Block Captain

Block Captains should be designated for every 10-15 houses/units, and they should be directly involved with their immediate neighbors. The Block Captain's responsibilities may include:

- Establishing a "telephone chain" by compiling and distributing a current list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of block residents.
- Visiting and inviting new residents to join, as well as notifying them of meetings and training sessions.
- Contacting each neighbor to discuss possible crime problems, requirements for assistance, and suggestions for program improvement.

Effective Leadership

Effective Neighborhood Watch leadership is crucial to success. Block Captains should be chosen from within each neighborhood that participates in the Watch Program. As a leader your responsibilities include:

Informing – Each individual in the program needs to know what to look for and how to respond. It is the leader's responsibility to make sure information gets to the watch group.

Empowering – By giving the people in your community the knowledge they need, they will be enabled to handle a wide range of possible situations.

Involving – The leader must set the example by being involved in the program and encouraging others to do the same.

Rewarding – While the added security resulting from the program does provide reward, it is important for the leaders to recognize and praise individual contributions to the program. Recognition is a strong motivator for participants. A small thank you or a certificate can go a long way!

Activities

- Weekly newspaper column
- Daily radio tips
- Monthly newsletters
- E-mail/Social Media updates
- Phone Chains



Planning Meetings

The key to planning a successful Neighborhood Watch meeting is organization. Neighborhood Watch leaders should be aware that participants are volunteering time out of their busy schedules and should work to ensure time-efficient meetings. Meeting leaders should have the facilities prepared prior to the meeting, should start and finish on time, and should thank participants for their time and contributions to keeping their community safe and secure.

Facility

- Choose one as close to the participants as possible
- Schedule meeting space to avoid conflict
- Provide space appropriate for the number of participants
- Arrange room properly to encourage interaction
- Minimize distractions
- Ensure availability of proper electrical outlets
- Ensure proper lighting
- Ensure adjustable climate controls

Pre-Meeting Check List

- Handouts and materials for participants
- Pens, pencils, notepads
- Name tags
- Refreshments, snacks
- Office items, staples, paperclips
- Outside speaker arrangements have been made with adequate electrical equipment for presentations
- Agenda
- Sign-up sheet
- Appropriate people invited (i.e. law enforcement agency)
- Advertise meeting (flyers, mail, email etc.)
- Flip charts and marker

Conducting Meetings

A successful Neighborhood Watch meeting should energize and inform the attendees. It is important to empower the participants to be proactive in all crime prevention and emergency preparedness efforts. Encourage participants to enlist other neighbors concerned about the community's safety and security to get involved.

To present a successful watch meeting

- Know your audience
- Be familiar with the subject
- Review the agenda and anticipate questions
- Manage the breaks (if needed)
- Avoid time disruptions

Managing the meeting

- Establish objectives
- Concentrate on priority items
- Use an agenda to help stay on topic
- Do not procrastinate – be decisive
- Do not lose sight of the intended result

Time-wasters

- Cell phone interruptions
- Drop-in attendees
- Socializing
- Attempting to do too much
- Fear of decision making
- Duplication of effort

Tips for Public Speaking

1. Start on time and be energetic
2. Move around the room
3. Make eye contact with everyone
4. Speak loud and at a good pace
5. Avoid distractions

Revitalizing a Watch Group

Although many Neighborhood Watch groups are created out of necessity (high crime rate, fear in the community, or speeding issues), once the “hot” issues of the day are resolved, apathy can set-in. It is important to find other activities to keep your group engaged. Here are a few tips to invigorate your group.

- Develop an e-mail newsletter. An electronic newsletter will save copying and mailing costs, can provide essential information, and often may be linked to your local law enforcement agency’s homepage
- Form a team to actively recruit new members or encourage previous members to attend. Oftentimes, lack of attendance can be tied to lack of information. If neighbors are more informed of safety and security issues, they are more likely to become actively involved.
- Partner with your local law enforcement agency to organize safety fairs and other activities. Each neighborhood can be responsible for a specialized activity (distributing safety and prevention information, etc.).
- Schedule special trainings on senior citizen protection from identity theft, emergency response, first aid, home hazards, or how to help people with disabilities in emergencies. If possible, hold training in conjunction with a neighborhood cookout or other festive event.
- Attend and teach programs on Neighborhood Watch, volunteerism, citizen preparedness, and citizen police academies.
- Assign Neighborhood Watch leaders to visit with new law enforcement officers or recruits in order to establish relationships early on.
- Provide recognition to watch leaders and participants such as plaques, certificates, awards.
- Expand the Neighborhood Watch concerns beyond crime prevention to include quality of life issues (vandalism, noise, street racing, neighborhood decay, etc.) that affect safety and security in the community.

Most of all, keep your Neighborhood Watch group members active and involved. They will feel part of a successful initiative and know that their role is of vital importance to the community.

