

# Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch musters the efforts of concerned residents to promote block-level security through a program of awareness, communication and education. It is an organized program that helps develop everyone's power of observation and fosters mutual assistance and concern among neighbors.

Neighborhoods are changing. The old, well-established neighborhood has been replaced by a highly transient, growing community. People don't know their neighbors as they once did. The lack of familiarity leads to apathy and a reduced sense of responsibility. The result is 'new' neighborhoods vulnerable to criminal attack.

## Goals of Neighborhood Watch

The main objective of Neighborhood Watch is to reduce the incidence of crime by:

- Increasing residents' awareness of neighborhood crime by establishing a communication network.
- Helping residents improve their home security and assisting them in safeguarding their personal property (Security Surveys and Operation Identification).
- Developing a neighborhood network where neighbors help watch each other's property and report suspicious persons and activities to law enforcement agencies (Neighborhood Watch).
- Encouraging all residents to cooperate with law enforcement agencies in reporting crime.
- Enlisting each home/apartment and business in Operation Identification (recording serial numbers and using a property engraver).

## Duties and Responsibilities

### Neighborhood Coordinator(s)

- Coordinate Neighborhood Watch activities for their neighborhood.
- Recruit residents into the program.
- Serve as the liaison with City staff and police to disseminate information and foster communication about suspicious activity and crime.

### Block Captains

- Help recruit residents into the program
- Distribute Crime Prevention materials to those residents who were unable to attend meetings (Security Surveys and Operation Identification).
- Act as a point-of-contact for Operation Identification by providing property engravers and pamphlets to their neighbors. The goal of 100% participation is essential in order to achieve the program objectives. The Block Captain is encouraged to personally contact those neighbors who have not participated in the program.
- Assist Neighborhood Coordinator(s).

### Participants

- Act as the "eyes and ears" for the police.
- Report any suspicious activity.
- Complete a Home Security Survey and correct any security weaknesses that are identified.
- Participate in Operation Identification.
- Stay informed about criminal activity and suspicious activity in the neighborhood

## What Is Suspicious? When To Call Police?

The effectiveness of a law enforcement department's crime prevention efforts is enhanced by active participation on the part of residents. By calling to report suspicious persons or activity, you not only aid the police, you make your community a safer place to live. Some people fail to call the police because they are not aware of activities that might be suspicious. Others may notice suspicious activity and hesitate to call for fear of being labeled a "nosy neighbor" or a "crank." Still others take it for granted that someone else has already called. Neighborhood Watch asks you to report *all* suspicious activity to the police, and let the police determine how they are going to respond.

**Call 301-333-4000** (Prince George's County Police Non-Emergency) *immediately* when you observe suspicious activity. **Do not** worry about "bothering" police. **Do not** worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove unfounded. **Think instead about what could happen if you do not act.**

**Information Most Often Needed:** What happened? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Was anyone hurt?

**Description of Persons:** When describing suspects, notice age, race, sex, height and weight. Compare your own weight and height with the suspect's. Pick out some unique characteristics (scars, nose, jewelry, etc.) that will help you identify the suspect in the future if need be. Include clothing – especially shoes.

**Description of Vehicle:** License number, make, model, color, any noticeable damage and direction of travel.

**REMEMBER:** For police assistance, call 301-333-4000 (Prince George's County Police Non-Emergency) or 9-1-1 (Emergency).

### Obvious Things to Watch For

Anything that seems even slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day or night could be criminal activity. Some of the most obvious activities to watch for and report include:

- A stranger entering your neighbor's house when it is unoccupied.
- A scream heard anywhere.
- Offers of merchandise at ridiculously low prices.
- Anyone removing accessories, license plates or gas from a car.
- Anyone peering into parked cars.
- Persons entering or leaving a business place after hours.
- A sound of breaking glass or loud explosive noises.
- Persons loitering around schools, parks and secluded areas.
- Persons loitering in the neighborhood who do not live there.
- Anyone forcing entrance to, or tampering with a residence, business or vehicle.

### Not-So-Obvious Things to Watch For

Not every stranger who comes into your neighborhood is a criminal by any means. There are many perfectly legitimate door-to-door salesmen, repairmen, and servicemen moving around our neighborhoods all the time. But criminals do take advantage of this by assuming the guise of legitimate business representatives. After all, if a criminal looked like a criminal, no one would have any trouble spotting him. Check the identification of all solicitors, meter readers, and repairmen prior to allowing entry into your home. Be suspicious of an alleged deliveryman with a wrong address or asking if someone else lives there.

Some of the not-so-obvious things to watch for are:

**Someone Going Door-to-Door In Your Neighborhood**

Watch for awhile. If, after a few houses are visited, one or more of the 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. Such action is even more suspicious if one person remains in the front when this occurs or if there is a car following a few houses away. Call the police department or 9-1-1 immediately; do not wait for the person to leave.

**A Person Exhibiting Unusual Mental or Physical Symptoms:**

May be injured, under the influence of drugs or otherwise needing medical or psychiatric assistance.

**Human Traffic To And From a Certain Residence**

Is not suspicious unless it occurs on a daily or very regular basis; especially during late or unusual hours. It could possibly be the scene of vice activities or a fence operation.

**Any Vehicle Moving Slowly And Without Lights or Following a Course That Appears Aimless or Repetitive in Any Location**

But particularly so 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, Occupied Vehicles Containing One or More Persons**

If it is an unusual hour they could be lookouts for a burglary in progress, even if the occupants appear to be legitimate.

**Vehicles Being Loaded With Valuables if Parked in Front of a Closed Business**

Or unattended residence-even if the vehicle is a legitimate looking commercial vehicle. More and more professional thieves are taking the time and trouble to customize their vehicles with special signs in order to move more freely without suspicion.

**Apparent Business Transactions Conducted From a Vehicle:**

Especially around schools or parks. If juveniles are involved, it could mean a possible drug sale.

**Persons Being Forced Into Vehicles:**

Especially if juveniles or females, may mean a kidnapping.

**An Abandoned Vehicle Parked On Your Block**

May be a stolen car.

**Continuous Repair Operations at Non-Business Locations**

Could mean stolen property is being stripped, repainted or otherwise altered.

**Open or Broken Doors or Windows at a Closed Business or Residence**

If owners are absent, could mean a burglary in progress or already completed.

**A Beam From a Flashlight in a Neighbor's Home**

Especially if they are away.

**Persons Wearing or Carrying Bloody Clothing**

Could be a suspect or victim of a serious crime.

**Persons Making a Quick Change of Vehicles**

May be attempting to elude the police or abandoning a stolen vehicle.

While some, if not all, of the suspicious situations described could have innocent explanations, law enforcement departments would rather investigate a crime-prone situation than be called when it too late. **Your call could save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a criminal act. Be Alert!**

## **Operation Identification**

Operation Identification is a property marking program that has been successful in reducing or eliminating burglary and theft in communities where it has been properly implemented. The program is based on the premise that items that are difficult for a thief to sell are less likely to be stolen. It is easy to participate in Operation Identification and costs you nothing but a little time.

First, list all your valuable property on the inventory form provided by the department. Second, engrave your driver's license number on the property with a property engraver that will be provided. Third, display the Operation Identification stickers on your doors and windows to warn the potential thief that all items have been marked for ready identification by law enforcement agencies.

Operation Identification materials are available from your Neighborhood Watch program.