

# Neighborhood Watch Guide



Crime and Violence Prevention Center  
California Attorney General's Office  
Bill Lockyer, Attorney General

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# Introduction

The Neighborhood Watch program is one of the most effective means available for keeping crime out of our neighborhoods. It relies on the best crime fighting tool ever invented — a good neighbor. Fortunately, good neighbors are found everywhere. They live in houses and in apartment buildings and in urban, suburban and rural areas.

When neighbors work together with law enforcement, it creates the best crime fighting team around. Be a good neighbor and make your community safer from criminals by starting a Neighborhood Watch program. Remember, the battle against crime will not be won by people acting on their own.

To help you start your Neighborhood Watch, the Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Center and the California Crime Prevention Officers Association have developed this guide. It explains how to work with law enforcement to start and sustain an effective Neighborhood Watch program. It also has information on special activities and how to report crimes.

Neighborhood Watch is only a beginning. It can be the basis for an ongoing dialogue and cooperative relationship with law enforcement and other city and county agencies. When you're ready to set up your first Neighborhood Watch meeting, call your local law enforcement agency. Its crime prevention unit may be able to assist you and tell you more about working together to prevent crime in your community.

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# **What Is Neighborhood Watch?**

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention program which enlists the active participation of citizens in cooperation with law enforcement to reduce crime in their communities.

It involves:

- ◆ Neighbors getting to know each other, taking the time to care about each other and working together in a program of mutual assistance.
- ◆ Training citizens to recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighborhoods.
- ◆ Citizens implementing crime prevention strategies such as home security and Operation Identification.

You may hear it called Neighborhood Watch, Home Alert, Citizens Crime Watch or Block Watch. The names differ, but the idea is the same:

**Neighbors looking out  
for each other!**

# Why Neighborhood Watch?

There can't be a law enforcement officer on every corner, so citizen involvement is essential to combat crime.

You and your neighbors are the ones who really know what is going on in your community.

By cooperating with each other and law enforcement, people can help fight crime in their community in the most effective way — before it begins!

Neighborhood Watch members place stickers in their windows and post Neighborhood Watch signs on streets, warning criminals that they are in an active Neighborhood Watch Community, and that "neighbors are watching out for each other."



# How Do I Start A Neighborhood Watch Program?

## ***Contact your local law enforcement agency.***

- ◆ Explain that you would like to start a Neighborhood Watch group and ask for assistance.
- ◆ Get help from their crime prevention unit. Many law enforcement agencies have a crime prevention officer or specialist who can help you organize your initial meeting.
- ◆ Ask about the crime statistics in your neighborhood.
- ◆ Ask to have a law enforcement representative at your first meeting.

## ***Talk to your neighbors.***

- ◆ Canvass your neighborhood for interest.
- ◆ Discuss crime problems in your area, using the information you received from your law enforcement agency.
- ◆ Briefly explain the value of the Neighborhood Watch program.
- ◆ Ask about convenient times to schedule your first Neighborhood Watch meeting.

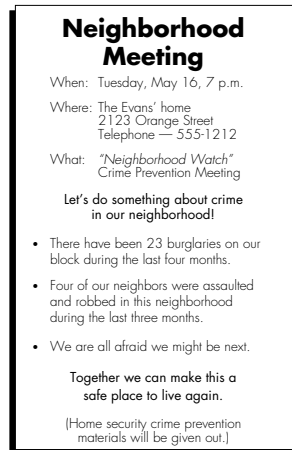
## ***Be sure to mention that:***

- ◆ Neighborhood Watch does not require frequent meetings.
- ◆ It does not ask that anyone take any personal risks to prevent crime.

- ◆ Your neighborhood may be able to get Neighborhood Watch signs for your street.
- ◆ Law enforcement personnel may attend your meetings to answer questions about crime in your community and provide valuable information on how the police or sheriff's department works.
- ◆ Neighborhood Watch leaves the responsibility for apprehending criminals where it belongs — with your law enforcement agency.

**Arrange a date, time and place for the first meeting.**

- ◆ Set the meeting date far enough in advance to give everyone adequate notice.
- ◆ Select a time that is convenient for most neighbors and your law enforcement representative.
- ◆ Develop and distribute a flyer announcing the meeting.
- ◆ If possible, meet in the home of a neighbor to foster an informal, comfortable atmosphere.
- ◆ Remind everyone of the meeting date as it approaches (two to three days before).
- ◆ Remember, don't be disappointed if everyone cannot attend. One hundred percent neighborhood participation is desirable but is not required for the program to work.



(Sample Flyer)

## ***Hold the first meeting.***

- ◆ Distribute name tags.
- ◆ Make opening remarks.
- ◆ Provide simple refreshments such as coffee and cookies. This creates a relaxed atmosphere and encourages people to “get to know each other.”
- ◆ Ask your local law enforcement official to cover the following topics:
  - ✓ The law enforcement agency and its crime prevention programs.
  - ✓ The Neighborhood Watch program — that it is a cooperative effort between concerned citizens and the law enforcement agency.
  - ✓ The specific crime problems in your area.
  - ✓ How to obtain Neighborhood Watch signs.
  - ✓ Effective crime prevention techniques for home and neighborhood.
  - ✓ Other crime prevention programs available in your community.
  - ✓ How citizens can become law enforcement’s “eyes and ears” and help them in their investigation of crimes.
  - ✓ How to report a crime: what to look for; how to describe the person, vehicle or activity; and other information such as location or names, etc. that will help solve the crime.

## **Select a Block Captain.**

The role of the Block Captain is to:

- ◆ Be a spokesperson for the group.
- ◆ Serve as the liaison between law enforcement and your Neighborhood Watch group to organize and arrange Neighborhood Watch meetings. Recruit neighbors to share the responsibility of hosting meetings.
- ◆ Maintain a list of all members.
- ◆ Designate work assignments that may include:
  - ✓ New members
  - ✓ Vacation home watch
  - ✓ Neighborhood patrol
  - ✓ Fund raising
  - ✓ Secretarial duties
  - ✓ Developing and maintaining block maps
  - ✓ Materials distribution

Remind members to call law enforcement with concerns — not the Block Captain. The Block Captain's role is to assist the watch but not to monitor problems.

To share the work load and responsibilities, the Block Captain position can be rotated on a regularly scheduled basis.

*Remember: If the Block Captain resigns or passes on the responsibility, notify your law enforcement representative and suggest a replacement.*

## ***Develop and distribute maps.***

A map will help members give law enforcement precise information when reporting suspicious activity in your neighborhood. Your map should:

- ◆ Identify the Block Captain/Coordinator.
- ◆ Clearly identify streets, cross-streets and compass points.
- ◆ Show the name, address and phone numbers of each home and identify which ones have burglar alarms.
- ◆ Identify senior citizens and/or neighbors with health problems who need special attention.
- ◆ List the make, model and license plate numbers of the vehicles at each home. Help neighbors by letting them know which vehicles belong there during daytime hours.
- ◆ Include emergency and non-emergency numbers for police, sheriff, fire and ambulance. (For crime-in-progress or life threatening situations, call 911 immediately.)
- ◆ Include the phone numbers of your city/county services (street, refuse and water) and business numbers for the police and fire departments.
- ◆ Update and reissue this map when any information changes.

### ***Gather and share information.***

Knowing more about your neighbors, their vehicles and their daily routines will help you to recognize unusual or suspicious activities.

- ◆ Consider exchanging the following types of basic information with your neighbors:
  - ✓ Home and work phone numbers
  - ✓ Number, ages and names of family members or residents
  - ✓ Work hours
  - ✓ School or day care hours of children
  - ✓ Who owns pets – in case of fire
  - ✓ Planned vacations or visitors
  - ✓ Scheduled deliveries or repairs

## **MAINTAINING A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH PROGRAM**

Now that your Neighborhood Watch network is established, be sure that everyone understands and observes the following guidelines:

- ◆ Be alert to unusual or suspicious behavior in your neighborhood. Call law enforcement if warranted. Write down descriptions of the person(s) and license numbers of any vehicles involved. (See sample forms on pages 17-18.)
- ◆ 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 neighbors' homes when they are away, and ask them to look after yours. This includes picking up mail or newspapers and putting back the garbage cans or recycling bins. Don't leave signals that say "no one is home."



- ◆ Attend Neighborhood Watch meetings often. Your local crime prevention officer will teach you about local crime trends and what you can do about them.
- ◆ Above all, get involved. It is the most effective way to reduce or prevent crime and make your neighborhood safe.
- ◆ Remember, your job is to report crime. The responsibility for apprehending criminals belongs to law enforcement.

## **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

The key to keeping a Neighborhood 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.

Neighborhood Watch can easily be adapted to meet your needs — wherever you live. Many agencies have created special apartment watch programs, and most sheriff's departments work closely with the County Farm Bureaus to create special rural crime prevention programs.

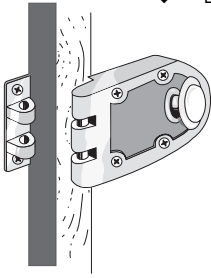
Active Neighborhood Watch groups can make changes through their local officials, such as improving street lighting, altering police patrol schedules and changing traffic flow patterns. Active apartment or multi-family dwelling groups can make changes by working closely with their landlords or building 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 Neighborhood Watch group enjoyable. Remember, people will most likely become involved and remain interested if the programs are fun as well as meaningful. Use your imagination. Schedule potluck dinners, organize clean-up campaigns or hold block parties. The following information may be helpful in the areas of:

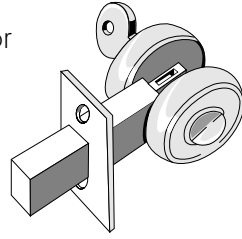
- ✓ Home Security
- ✓ Apartment & Multi-Unit Dwelling Security
- ✓ Crime Awareness
- ✓ Operation Identification
- ✓ Bicycle Safety
- ✓ Silent Observers
- ✓ Rural Areas
- ✓ Neighborhood Watch Coalition

### **HOME SECURITY**

- ◆ Ask your law enforcement agency for help with “home security surveys” for individual residences.
- ◆ Invite an officer to speak to your Neighborhood Watch group about home security. (Consider combining the talk with a potluck dinner to generate interest.)



- ◆ Learn how to secure your homes with:
  - ✓ Effective door and window locks
  - ✓ Adequate exterior lighting
  - ✓ Security habits
  - ✓ Landscaping



## **APARTMENT and MULTI-UNIT DWELLING SECURITY**

- ◆ Invite a law enforcement representative to advise your group and landlord/building manager on the best security devices and practices.
- ◆ Work with your landlord/building manager to install locks, lighting, landscaping or a security system. Establish policies on admitting visitors, service and salespersons.
- ◆ Make sure that patio, terrace areas and communal areas such as the lobby, laundry room, elevators, hallways and garages are secure and well-lit at night.

## **OPERATION IDENTIFICATION**

The Operation Identification program encourages homeowners to mark their property to make it easier to identify it if stolen. Some programs provide window decals as a warning to burglars.

- ◆ Purchase an engraver so that everyone in your Neighborhood Watch group can mark items such as television sets, computers and stereos.
- ◆ Urge residents to engrave their driver's license numbers (preceded by the letters "CA") on their personal property.  
*Do not use social security numbers.*

- ◆ Encourage residents to make a list of their firearms, personal computers and other electronic equipment along with the serial and model numbers. Keep the list in a safe place, such as your safety deposit box.
- ◆ Photograph items which can't be marked, such as jewelry. For larger items, use a video camera to make a record of ownership. Keep photos and video in a secure location.

### **BICYCLE SAFETY**

- ◆ Hold a "bike rodeo" within your neighborhood. Conclude the event with a talk on bicycle security and safety.
- ◆ Encourage everyone to license their bicycles with the local law enforcement agency.

### **SILENT OBSERVERS**

- ◆ In many communities, senior citizens, shut-ins, persons who work at home and other neighborhood people watch for and report suspicious events.
- ◆ Some programs are designed so that observers may report by number rather than name to protect their identities.
- ◆ Call your law enforcement agency to find out if it is participating in programs, such as "Silent Witness, Secret Witness, Witness Anonymous or Crime Stoppers," to encourage crime reporting. Many California communities give out cash rewards for information leading to arrest and conviction.

## **RURAL AREAS**

- ◆ Work with your sheriff's department and County Farm Bureau and/or the Grange to establish Farm Watch and to obtain security tips for heavy machinery, livestock and farm products.
- ◆ Develop communication networks with neighbors and the sheriff's department. Use citizens' band radios and cellular phones for emergency communication with neighbors and/or law enforcement agencies. Relay information on thefts of equipment, cattle or other livestock, crops and other agricultural products and vandalism.

## **CRIME AWARENESS**

- ◆ Call upon law enforcement experts and community leaders to participate in neighborhood meetings or workshops on a variety of topics, including:
  - ✓ Personal safety tips
    - prevention of rape, assaults or robbery
  - ✓ Bicycle, auto or boat theft prevention
  - ✓ Gangs
  - ✓ Child abuse – recognition and prevention
  - ✓ Alcohol and other drug use and abuse
  - ✓ Drug houses and clandestine laboratories
  - ✓ School safety
  - ✓ Child safety
  - ✓ Senior citizens
    - con games, personal safety and elder abuse
  - ✓ Criminal justice system
    - police, courts and corrections

## **NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH COALITIONS**

In many communities, individual Neighborhood Watch groups unite to form a coalition. By coordinating their efforts, individual groups find they can share valuable information, as well as increase the impact of their concerns with city and county decision makers. Usually block captains represent their neighborhood at coalition meetings.

Some groups have even formed organizations to raise money for crime prevention programs within their communities.

If you would like to explore these possibilities, discuss them with your local law enforcement agency.

## **IF A CRIME OCCURS — REPORT IT!**

Sound easy? Unfortunately, only about half of all crimes are ever reported. Too bad, because law enforcement can't do anything if they don't know what happened. Eyewitness information is the key to solving many crimes. Remember these tips when reporting crime to your law enforcement agency:

- ◆ Call the police/sheriff immediately. A five-minute delay may reduce the chance of ever catching the criminal.
- ◆ Tell the police/sheriff as much as you can. No fact is too trivial. In many cases it is what victims and witnesses tell police about the criminal that results in an arrest. The police/sheriff can use answers to as many of these

questions as possible. Please remember that wrong information is worse than no information at all.

- What occurred?
  - When did this occur?
  - Where did this occur?
  - How many suspects were there?
  - What did they do?
  - What did they say?
  - What did they take?
  - Which way did they go?
  - Were there any other witnesses? What are their names, addresses, or phone numbers?
  - Is there any other information which you feel is important?
  - Can you describe the suspect(s)?
    - See Suspect Description Form, page 17.
  - Can you describe their vehicle(s)?
    - See Vehicle Description Form, page 18.
- 
- ◆ Sometimes, due to limited resources and personnel, law enforcement may not be able to respond immediately. They prioritize their calls based on apparent danger to human life. Don't be discouraged. They will get to you as soon as possible.
  - ◆ Even an anonymous tip is better than nothing. Don't hesitate! Follow this rule:  
*If you see something suspicious, call law enforcement—fast—so they can act—fast. The longer you wait, the harder it is to catch the criminal.*

***Once You Have Reported The Crime, Stick With It.***

- ◆ It pays to prosecute. The majority of criminals who are arrested for property crimes are convicted.
- ◆ Being a witness in court is not as much trouble as you think. Each community provides services to help victims and witnesses with transportation, day care services or follow-up counseling.
- ◆ To get the phone number of your local victim/witness assistance center, call your local law enforcement agency or 1-800-VICTIMS (1-800-842-8467).

For more information, write to:  
Crime and Violence Prevention Center  
Attorney General's Office  
P.O. Box 944255  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550

# SUSPECT DESCRIPTION FORM

Sex: Race: Age: Height: Weight:

Hair Color: Length: Style: Sideburns:

Eye Color: Glasses: Style:

Face Complexion: Mustache : Beard:

Ski Mask : Stocking/Mask:

Other: Tattoos:

Amputation:

Scars/Marks:

Speech/Accent:

Distinguishable Gait/Limp:

Bag/Backpack, etc.:

Clothing: Cap/Hat:

Coat/Jacket:

Shirt/Tie or Blouse:

Pants:

Skirt:

Dress:

Shoes:

Stockings:

Gloves:

Jewelry:

Purse:

Weapon: Handgun/Knife, etc.:

# VEHICLE DESCRIPTION FORM

License Plate (State): \_\_\_\_\_ Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Make: \_\_\_\_\_ Model: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Body Style (2-door, convertible, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

Color: \_\_\_\_\_

Identifying hub caps, wheels, dents, scratches, bumper stickers,  
decals, etc.:

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# Acknowledgements

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