

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH



Organizer's Guide

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Community & Youth Outreach Division
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People working together can make a difference!

The Newport News Police Department strives to provide the best possible services to the citizens of the City of Newport News on a fair and impartial basis. To achieve these goals, the Department reserves the right to institute innovative programs that have proven successful in other jurisdictions.

Recognizing the need to enlist the assistance of the citizens of Newport News in the fight against criminal activity in the city, the Department promotes and supports Neighborhood Watch groups. This has resulted in public awareness, motivation, and education.

Crime and the fear of crime threaten a community's well being - people become afraid to use streets and parks, suspicion erupts between young and old, and businesses gradually leave. Crime in turn feeds on the isolation it creates. Today's lifestyles – many homes where both parents work, more single-parent families, and greater job mobility – can contribute to community isolation and weaken civic ties.

You and your neighbors can prevent or break this vicious cycle, and in the process, build your community into a safer, friendlier, and more caring place to live. Statistics tell the story. Substantial decreases in crime have been reported as a result of crime prevention efforts.

Start with a Neighborhood Watch to address immediate crime issues, focus on home security, and build neighborhood cohesion. Then move into other areas such as educating residents about child protection, drug abuse prevention, victim services, and domestic violence prevention and intervention. Explore circumstances in the community that might contribute to crime – such as the physical design of buildings, traffic patterns, drug trafficking, lack of affordable housing – and look for long range solutions.

The First Building Block Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch, Block Watch, Town Watch, Apartment Watch – no matter what you call it, this is the MOST effective and least costly answer to crime. Watch groups are the foundation of community crime prevention; they can be a stepping stone to community revitalization.

Getting Started – Meetings, Block Captains, and Maps

- **Form a small planning committee of neighbors to discuss needs, the level of interest, possible challenges, and the Watch concept.**
- **Contact the Community Resource Officer for your precinct to discuss Neighborhood Watch and crime issues. Invite the officer to your meeting(s).**
- **Publicize your meeting(s) at least one week in advance with door-to-door flyers and follow up with phone calls the day before if necessary.**
- **Select a meeting place that is also easily accessible for individuals with disabilities.**
- **Hold an initial meeting to gauge neighbors' interest; establish a purpose for the program; and begin to identify issues that need to be addressed. Stress that a Watch group is an association of neighbors who look out for each other's families and property, alert the police to any suspicious activities or crime in progress, and work together to make your community a safer and better place to live.**

Benefits of Neighborhood Watch

Neighborhood Watch programs are designed to instill a greater sense of security, well-being, and reduce the fear of crime in your community. Neighborhood Watch also brings law enforcement and the community together as a team to reduce crime. Some of the other benefits of Neighborhood Watch are:

- ***Reduce the risk of becoming a victim of crime.*** The risk is reduced because participants are taught how to take preventive measures that substantially decrease the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. Not only does Neighborhood Watch reduce the risk of your home being burglarized, the likelihood of other crimes occurring such as vandalism, personal assault, and fraud also decreases.

- ***Greater access to criminal activity information.*** Neighborhood Watch groups are designed to keep participants informed of crime trends and patterns so you will be better prepared to spot criminal activity in your neighborhood.
- ***Will be prepared to handle suspicious activity.*** The program trains members to report suspicious activities occurring in their neighborhood and what information law enforcement will need when taking a report.
- ***Knowing your neighbors.*** Neighborhood Watch promotes getting to know your neighbors so that each of you will be able to report any unusual activity if something looks "out of place" or suspicious. This means when you are away you can feel more secure about your property.
- ***Reduces the fear of crime and improves overall neighborhood safety.*** Neighborhood Watch increases the number of arrests and convictions, by serving as a network for law enforcement and citizens to effectively communicate about the activities in their communities.

Starting and maintaining a Neighborhood Watch

How to start a Neighborhood Watch

1. The first step is to visit your neighbors and explain that you are interested in starting a Neighborhood Watch in your community. Inform them of the benefits of having a program and that you would appreciate their support and attendance at the start-up meeting.
2. Find out the best day of the week and time for a meeting. For the best results, the meeting should be held in a home on your block. Inform them that you will get back to them with the date and time of the meeting. This will also give you time to contact the Community Resource Officer(s) to request they attend the start-up meeting. Please allow 2 to 3 weeks advance notice to avoid any scheduling conflicts.
3. Once the date is determined, create an announcement flyer or postcard, make copies of it, and distribute it to your neighbors. Try to keep the meeting to an hour or less.

Agenda for the 1st Neighborhood Watch Meeting

- 1. Have everyone in attendance sign a meeting sign-in sheet. The sheet includes: names, address, contact information (phone numbers, email addresses, etc.)**
- 2. Call the meeting to order and thank everyone for attending.**
- 3. Have all those present to introduce themselves and share where they live.**
- 4. The Community Resource Officer will then explain the benefits of a Neighborhood Watch.**
- 5. Inform everyone as a group they need to elect Block Captains and a Neighborhood Watch Chairperson, or have volunteers for these positions. Explain the responsibilities of the Chairperson and Block Captain.**
- 6. Determine how often the meetings will be held and set the date and time for the next meeting.**
- 7. Open the floor for questions.**
- 8. Thank everyone again for attending.**

Responsibilities of the Neighborhood Watch Chairperson

The Chairperson will be responsible for overseeing the operation of the Watch group. The Chairperson organizes activities for the neighborhood and acts as the liaison between the Community Resource Officer(s) and the Neighborhood Watch group.

The following is a list of some additional responsibilities of the Neighborhood Watch Chairperson:

- ❖ Make sure members are aware of programs/activities in the neighborhood, especially those organized by the Neighborhood Watch group.**
- ❖ Continuously recruit members for the group.**
- ❖ Ensure Block Captains are distributing information to individuals on their blocks.**

- ❖ **Maintain an update list of Neighborhood Watch Block Captain and members, to include names, addresses, contact numbers, and email addresses. To include providing this list to the Community Resource Officer(s) annually.**
- ❖ **Establishing sub-committees to address the problems and needs of your Neighborhood Watch group; such as the “Welcome Wagon Committee,” if your Neighborhood Watch group chooses to do so.**

Responsibilities of the Block Captain

Block Captain’s responsibility is in one area, usually a street block, with the block kept as small as possible. Small blocks are easier to manage and make it more likely that the neighbors will become and continue to become acquainted.

The Block Captain’s responsibilities include:

- ❖ **Distributing information, such as newsletters or update materials received from the Neighborhood Watch Chairperson.**
- ❖ **Ensuring that any and all crime in their area is immediately report to the Newport News Police Department.**
- ❖ **Updating the Block list along with welcoming new neighbors with their block and introducing them to the Neighborhood Watch program.**
- ❖ **Serving as a liaison between the Neighborhood Watch Chairperson and members in their Neighborhood Watch group.**

Responsibilities Neighborhood Watch members include:

- ❖ **Learning the names of your neighbors and being able to recognize them, and their vehicles.**
- ❖ **Attending as many Neighborhood Watch meetings as possible.**
- ❖ **Implementing security measures suggested by the Community Resource Officer after their home security survey has been completed. *For additional information on these surveys see your Community Resource Officer(s).***
- ❖ **Keeping an eye on your neighbor’s homes and reporting any suspicious activities to the Newport News Police Department.**

- ❖ Teaching your children about the need for crime prevention and respecting law enforcement.
- ❖ Never attempting to stop a crime or make an arrest. SAFETY always comes first.
- ❖ When planning on leaving for any length of time, make sure someone is designated to pick up your mail, newspapers, etc.
- ❖ Notify the Block Captain and other neighbors if you plan to be gone for any length of time so your home can be watched.

Organizers and block captains must emphasize that Watch groups are not vigilantes and do not assume the role of the police. They only ask neighbors to be alert, observant, and caring and most importantly to report suspicious activity of crimes to the police immediately.

Responsibilities of the Newport News Police Department

An effective Neighborhood Watch program requires the participation of every member, plus a continual flow of information through the organization. The Newport News Police Department is responsible for collecting, correlating, and disseminating any information which will help to make your neighborhood a safe place to live.

The Community Resource Officer provides a variety of information to the Neighborhood Watch group and serves as a liaison. Keeping Neighborhood Watch members informed is one of the Community Resource Officer's primary responsibilities. Utilize them as the resource they are. Community Resource Officers have access to information concerning on-going complaints, particular crime trends, or situations that may affect the success of your Neighborhood Watch. Chairpersons are strongly encouraged to maintain close contact with the Community Resource Officers.

Tips for Success

- **Hold regular meetings to help residents get to know each other and to collectively decide upon program strategies and activities.**
- **Consider linking with an existing organization, such as a citizen's association, tenants' association, housing authority, etc.**
- **Canvas door-to door to recruit members.**
- **Involve everyone – young and old, single and married, renter and homeowner.**
- **Establish a relationship with the Community Resource Officer in your precinct. This is critical to your Watch group's credibility. The Newport News Police Department is the major source of information on crime patterns, home security, crime reporting, and other crime prevention topics.**
- **Get information out quickly. Share all kinds of news – quash rumors.**
- **Gather the facts about crime in your particular neighborhood. Often residents' opinions are not supported by facts, and accurate information can reduce the fear of crime.**
- **Physical conditions like abandoned cars or overgrown vacant lots contribute to crime. Sponsor cleanups, encourage residents to beautify the area, and ask them to turn on outdoor lights at night.**

It is essential to celebrate the success of the effort and recognize volunteers' contributions through such events as awards, annual dinners, and parties. To meet community needs, your Neighborhood Watch can address issues such as drug abuse, gangs, self-protection tactics, isolation of the elderly, crimes in schools, etc.

Don't forget events like National Night Out (sponsored by the National Association of Town Watches the first Tuesday of August each year) or a potluck dinner that gives neighbors a chance to get together. Such items as t-shirts, pins, hats, or coffee mugs with the name of your Neighborhood Watch group also enhances identity and pride.

How to Keep your Neighborhood Watch Going and Growing

When there is a decrease in criminal activity or neighborhood problems are alleviated, some Neighborhood Watch groups slowly lose momentum. To keep Neighborhood Watch programs vital, blend crime prevention into other community concerns.

Have your Watch group identify the neighborhood's strengths and weakness and then brainstorm on what members can do to improve the quality of the community. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- **Create exercise groups. Walking together or joining an aerobics class with other neighbors can make exercising more enjoyable.**
- **Your neighborhood can get together to plan what to do in case of an emergency. Take inventory of special skills and equipment that may be needed in an emergency.**
- **Encourage schools to teach crime and drug prevention in the classroom.**
- **Cooperate with parent associations, recreation departments, and schools to organize after-school programs for children and teens.**
- **Establish a "safe" house in the neighborhood for children in case of emergencies or frightening situations. Volunteers must meet specific standards, including a law enforcement background check which can be done for a fee with 2 forms of identification (one must be pictured) at Police Headquarters located at 9710 Jefferson Avenue, Newport News, Virginia 23605. Questions regarding background checks may be directed to: (757) 928-4100.**
- **Spearhead a Gang or Violence Prevention Task Force to assess issues and develop prevention strategies in your community.**
- **Partner with victim services to train your members in assisting victims of crime.**
- **Ask those individuals who seldom leave their houses to be "Window Watchers," looking out for children and unusual activities in the neighborhood.**

- **Sponsor a seminar for the elderly and others on how to avoid becoming victims of fraud and/or set up a committee to check on the elderly and other sick and shut-ins.**
- **Establish a “buddy” system for the elderly and people with disabilities, in which someone checks with them daily by phone and summons help if needed.**
- **Link neighborhood Watch to efforts promoted by other groups: drug prevention, child protection, anti-vandalism projects, neighborhood cleanup, recycling, etc. Share resources and promote each other’s activities. Invite guest speakers to Neighborhood Watch meetings.**
- **Start a community neighborhood prevention newsletter. Block captains or volunteers (including kids and teenagers) can distribute the newsletter, which also helps them keep in touch with residents.**
- **Publicize your Watch and its success in a newsletter, civic association paper, or other local media outlets.**
- **Plan a Block Party or Holiday activity such as decorating homes on the block on the same particular day. Or have a progressive dinner where portions of a planned meal are consumed at each house on the block and the Neighborhood Watch members go from house to house until the meal is finished.**
- **Refer local business owners to their precinct Community Resource Officer in hopes of establishing a Business Watch.**

Anything you can think of that brings the neighborhood together is a good idea. Do not be afraid to suggest other activities not listed above. The group can only benefit from becoming involved with its neighbors.

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH ORGANIZATIONAL OUTLINE

1. Organization: Name & Title

2. Central Goals of the Organization

3. Objectives of the Organization

4. Organizational Chart: Draw a chart that shows how information is passed to the membership.

5. Boundaries of the Organization

6. Total Number of dwelling within your boundaries _____

Total Number of dwellings participating in Neighborhood Watch _____

Total percentage of participants _____

7. General membership meetings will be held _____

Steering committee meetings will be held _____

8. Contact/Chairperson Name _____

Address/Phone # _____

Neighborhood Watch Block Captain Sign-Up Sheet

Street Name	Block Captain	Phone Number	Participating Houses	Number of Houses	Number of Teens

Neighborhood Watch Family Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home phone: _____

Work phone: _____ **Cell phone:** _____

Children: _____

Include names, ages, and the name of the school the children attend

**Resident's
Vehicles:**

	Year/Model	Color	License No.
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____

Note: Neighborhood Watch Captain(s) should keep this information in a notebook or file.



Neighborhood Watch Petition

Name of Neighborhood Watch _____

Name	Address	Contact #	Email Address
1.			
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