

Neighborhood Watch Handbook

City of West Hollywood
Public Safety Division



Be a “FAN”!

*Friends and Neighbors
of Neighborhood Watch*

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.

When neighbors work together with law enforcement, one of the best crime fighting teams around is created. Make your community safer from criminals by starting a Neighborhood Watch group in your neighborhood.

To help you start your Neighborhood Watch group, the City of West Hollywood's Public Safety Division has developed this guide. It explains how to start and sustain an effective Neighborhood Watch program. It also has important information on what is suspicious activity and how to report a crime.

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 are ready to set up your first Neighborhood Watch meeting, call the West Hollywood Public Safety Division at (323) 848-6414.

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Remember!
For a crime-in-progress or a life threatening situation, call 9-1-1 immediately!

What Is Neighborhood Watch?

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

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.
- Citizens being trained to recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighborhoods.
- Crime prevention strategies such as home security upgrades, property identification and other security measures being implemented by community members.
- 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!



How Do I Start A Neighborhood Watch Program?

Contact the Public Safety Division at City Hall.

- Call (323) 848-6414 and explain that you would like to start a Neighborhood Watch group and ask for assistance.
- Ask about the crime conditions in your neighborhood.

Talk to your neighbors.

- Canvas your neighborhood for interest.
- Discuss crime problems in your area, using the information you received from City staff.
- 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.

Be sure to mention that: *(continued)*

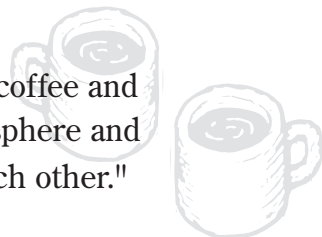
- Law enforcement personnel will attend your meetings along with the City's Staff. They will answer questions about crime in your neighborhood and provide valuable information on how a partnership with the Sheriff's Department will benefit you and your neighbors.
- Neighborhood Watch also serves as a vehicle to address other community concerns that impact the quality of life in neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood Watch leaves the responsibility for apprehending criminals where it belongs – with the Sheriff's Department.

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.
- Work with the Public Safety Division to 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.

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 the Public Safety Division to include the following topics on the meeting agenda:*
 1. The benefits of Neighborhood Watch.
 2. Sheriff's Department and City's Community Safety Department
 3. The specific crime problems in your area.
 4. How to obtain Neighborhood Watch signs.
 5. Effective crime prevention techniques for home and neighborhood.
 6. Other crime prevention programs available in your community.
 7. How community members can become law enforcement's "eyes and ears" and help them in their investigation of crimes.
 8. How to report a crime: what to look for; how to describe the person, vehicle or activity; and other information such as location, 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 the Sheriff's Department 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.

Remind members to call the Sheriff's Department with concerns – not the Block Captain. The Block Captain's role is to assist the Watch but not to monitor problems.

To share the workload and responsibilities, the Block Captain position can be rotated on a regularly scheduled basis. Also, the Block Captain should enlist the help of a Co-Captain.

Remember: If the Block Captain resigns or passes on the responsibility, notify City staff and suggest a replacement.

Develop and distribute maps.

A map can help community members be more familiar with their neighborhood and give law enforcement more complete information when reporting suspicious activity. Not all maps will look the same depending on the population on your street, how many units on your street, the type of units, and how many blocks your Neighborhood Watch group encompasses. Your map could:

- Identify the Block Captain/Co-Captain.
- Clearly identify streets, cross-streets and compass points.
- Clearly identify the addresses of each unit on the block.
- 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 the phone numbers of your city/county services (street, refuse and water) and business numbers for the sheriff 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:

1. Home and work phone numbers.
2. E-mail addresses.
3. Number, ages and names of family members or residents.
4. Work hours.
5. School or daycare hours of children.
6. Who owns a dog.
7. Planned vacations or visitors.
8. Scheduled deliveries or repairs.



Maintaining A Neighborhood Watch Program

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

- Be alert to unusual or suspicious behavior in your neighborhood and call the Sheriff's department if warranted. Write down descriptions of the person(s) and license numbers of any vehicles involved.
- Tell a trusted neighbor if your residence will be unoccupied for an extended period. Tell him or her how to reach you in an emergency.
- Look after your neighbor's property 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 to learn 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 the Sheriff's.

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.

Active Neighborhood Watch groups can make significant changes in the community, such as improving street lighting, altering Sheriff's patrol schedules and changing traffic flow patterns. Active apartment or multi-family dwelling groups can make changes by working closely with their property owners 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 participation in 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.

Home Security

- Ask your law enforcement agency for a home security inspection.
- Invite a Sheriff's deputy 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 devices
 - ✓ landscaping



Apartment and Multi-Unit Dwelling Security

- Invite a Sheriff's deputy to advise your group and the property/building manager on the best security devices and practices.
- Work with your property/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 identify their property to make it easier to report if stolen.

- Encourage residents to make a list of their personal computers and other electronic equipment along with their 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.

Crime Awareness

Call upon law enforcement experts and community leaders to participate in neighborhood meetings or workshops on a variety of topics. This includes:

- ✓ Personal safety tips (prevention of rape, assaults or robbery)
- ✓ Bicycle or auto 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
- ✓ Earthquake preparedness
- ✓ Hate crimes



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 the Public Safety Division.

If A Crime Occurs – Report It!

Sound easy? Unfortunately, only about half of all crimes are ever reported. This is unfortunate since the Sheriff's Department 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 Sheriff's Department immediately. A five-minute delay can reduce the chance of ever catching the criminal.

Do not attempt to stop or detain the suspect(s) yourself.

- Tell the Sheriff's Deputy as much as you can. No fact is too trivial. In many cases it is what victims and witnesses tell the Deputy about the criminal that results in an arrest. The Deputy can use answers to as many of these questions as possible.
 - ✓ *What occurred, when did it occur, and where?*
 - ✓ *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?*
 - ✓ *Is there any other information which you feel is important?*
 - ✓ *Can you describe the suspect(s)? (See Suspect Description Form in this booklet.)*

✓ *Can you describe their vehicle(s)?*

See Vehicle Description Form in this booklet.

✓ *What was the license plate number?*

- Sometimes, due to limited resources and personnel, the Sheriff's Department may not be able to respond immediately. They have to 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 the Sheriff's Department – fast. This way they can act fast. The longer you wait, the harder it is to catch the criminal.

What Is Suspicious?

Basically, anything that seems even slightly “out of place” or is occurring at an unusual time of day or night could be criminal activity.

Obvious Things To Watch For

- ✓ *A stranger entering your neighbor's house when it is unoccupied.*
- ✓ *A scream heard anywhere may mean robbery or assault.*
- ✓ *Offers of merchandise at ridiculously low prices may mean stolen property.*
- ✓ *Anyone removing accessories, license plates, or gas from a car should be reported.*
- ✓ *Anyone peering into parked cars may be looking for a car to steal or for valuables left in the car.*
- ✓ *Persons entering or leaving a business place after hours.*
- ✓ *A sound of breaking glass or loud explosive noises could mean an accident, burglary or vandalism.*
- ✓ *Persons loitering around schools, parks and secluded areas could be sex offenders.*
- ✓ *Persons loitering in the neighborhood who do not live there.*
- ✓ *Anyone forcing entry to, or tampering with a residence, business, or vehicle should be reported.*

Some Things To Watch For That Are Not So Obvious

- *Strangers And Solicitors*

Check identification of all solicitors, meter readers, and repairmen prior to allowing them entry into your home. Be suspicious of alleged deliverymen with a wrong address or asking if someone lives there.

- *Someone Carrying Property*

If it's at an unusual hour, or in an unusual place, or if the property is not wrapped as if just purchased.

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

Watch for awhile. If after a few houses are visited, one or more persons tries a door to see if it is locked, looks into a window, or goes into a back or side yard, it could be a burglar. Call the Sheriff's Department immediately; don't wait for the person to leave.

- *Traffic To And From A Certain Residence*

It is not suspicious unless it occurs on a daily basis or very regular basis, especially during late or unusual hours.

- *Any Person Taking A Shortcut Through A Backyard*

- *Any Vehicle Moving Slowly And Without Lights, Or Following A Course That Appears Aimless Or Repetitive In Any Location*

Particularly 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.

- *An Abandoned Vehicle Parked On Your Block*

May be a stolen vehicle.

- *Continuous Repair Operations At Non-Business Locations*

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

- *Persons Making A Quick Change Of Vehicles*

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

**Once You Have Reported The Crime, Stick With It!
It pays to prosecute. About 70% of the criminals
who are arrested for property crimes are convicted.**

Being a witness in court is not as much trouble as you may 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 you 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

(916) 324-7863

Suspect Description Form

Sex _____ Ethnicity _____

Age _____ Height _____ Weight _____

Hair: Color _____ Length _____

Style _____ Sideburns _____

Eyes: Color _____

Glasses _____ Type _____

Face: Complexion _____ Goatee _____

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/Blouse _____

Pants/Shorts _____

Skirt/Dress _____

Shoes/Stockings _____

Gloves _____

Jewelry _____

Weapon: Handgun/Knife, etc. _____

Vehicle Description Form

License Plate: State _____ Number _____

Make _____ Model _____

Year _____ Color _____

Body Style (2-door, convertible, etc.) _____

Identifying hubcaps, wheels, dents, scratches, bumper stickers,
decals, etc.: _____

License Plate: State _____ Number _____

Make _____ Model _____

Year _____ Color _____

Body Style (2-door, convertible, etc.) _____

Identifying hubcaps, wheels, dents, scratches, bumper stickers,
decals, etc.: _____

Important Phone Numbers

EMERGENCY

Sheriff's

Fire

Medical Emergency



911

**West Hollywood Sheriff's Department Non-Emergency Number
(310) 855-8850**

Visit the Sheriff's Website at: www.wehosherriff.com

City of West Hollywood Public Safety Division

(323) 848-6414

Visit the City's Website at: www.weho.org



**City of West Hollywood
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