

Neighborhood Watch Manual

USAonWatch - National Neighborhood Watch Program



BJA
Bureau of Justice Assistance
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Chapter 6

Neighborhood Watch Skills Using Your “Eyes and Ears”

Once you have established a strong Watch group, it is important to start building skills needed to make your group a success. While NW exists for more than just crime prevention, it is important to build the skills necessary for preventing crime as well as terrorist activity, and preparedness for natural/man-made disasters. Schedule training sessions with your law enforcement liaison or other law enforcement agencies that might have training courses. The National Sheriffs’ Association offers skill building training through the Neighborhood Watch Toolkit. Your local law enforcement may already have a Toolkit you can borrow for your meetings. Also look for other resources such as your state crime prevention association or the National Crime Prevention Council who may hold training in your area.

Observation Skills

Most people go through the day without even noticing everyday events. However beginning to recognize what is normal around you is the first step in recognizing what is not normal. Although law enforcement officers are trained observers, sometimes they find it difficult to explain to citizens what to report and when to report it. While patrolling the streets, officers get used to looking for activities or events that seem out of place or are not part of the regular or ordinary routine. Officers may not be able to articulate specifically what is unusual, but they are keenly aware that something is awry. Officers sometimes refer to

this phenomenon as a “sixth sense” or “street smarts,” and they instinctively know when something is not right and they should investigate. Community members should know they have the ability to recognize unusual events as well. It is a matter of practicing observation skills to make them stronger.

In order to understand how to properly observe people, vehicles and incidents that may affect us, we should begin by learning what types of things to observe. You should pay attention to things like:

- Physical setting
 - Specific location, time of day, day of week.
- People – What do they look like? (height, weight, ethnicity, gender, etc.) How many are there?
- Specific items – What is important?
- Routines – Did you notice any recurring patterns or routines? How often did they occur? Who was involved?



One of the keys to a successful Neighborhood Watch program is recognizing the importance of using good

observation skills to keep your neighborhood safe. Practice looking at pictures of people to know how to describe them. Clothing is important, but look for things that cannot be changed, like skin or eye color, tattoos, scars, moles, height and weight. Properly observing vehicles is similar to observing individuals. You always begin with the basics, such as the make and model of the vehicle. Identify the vehicle as a Ford, Chevrolet, Dodge, Honda, Mercedes, Volvo, etc. Then identify the both the type of vehicle (such an SUV, pickup truck, etc.), as well as the specific model if possible (such as Corolla, Accord, Expedition, etc.) To remember license plates: write it on paper, on your hand, or even scratch it in the dirt! License numbers are useful only if they are correct. Never hesitate to say, "I'm not sure." With a vehicle description, even a partial license plate can be valuable.

What is Suspicious Activity?
 Anything that feels uncomfortable or looks out of place.

- Someone peering into cars or windows.
- A high volume of traffic going to and coming from a home on a daily basis.
- Someone loitering around schools, parks, or secluded areas.
- Strange odors coming from a house, building, or vehicle.
- Open or broken doors and windows at a closed business or unoccupied residence.
- Someone tampering with electrical, gas, or sewer systems without an identifiable company vehicle or uniform.
- Persons arriving or leaving from homes or businesses at unusual hours.
- Multiple persons who appear to be working in unison and exhibiting suspicious behaviors.
- Signs of forced entry or tampering with security or safety systems.

What is Suspicious Activity?

All too often citizens are confused about what they should report and why, so it is important to train citizens through a variety of reporting activities. After reviewing this section, participants will be able to advise citizens specifically on the appropriate who, what, when, where, and how of reporting. Often citizens ask officers "Why should I get involved?" or "How am I going to benefit by reporting suspicious activity?" Although the answers may seem obvious, it must be clearly communicated to the public that they are an essential component in protecting our communities. Sometimes our citizens receive mixed signals regarding what to report and when to report it. Other times they simply do not know what is expected of them. It is important to learn specific definitions and details to provide Watch volunteers with clear and concise information. Begin with defining "suspicious activity." Officers should know the definition of suspicious activity and be able to properly communicate this definition to Watch members and other concerned citizens. Suspicious activity can refer to any incident, event, individual or activity that seems unusual or out of place. Some common examples of suspicious activities include:

Report:

- Suspicious activities, people watching vehicles
- Illegal activities
- Unusual events or incidents
- Dangerous situations

- A stranger loitering in your neighborhood or a vehicle cruising the streets repeatedly.

The effectiveness of the police and sheriffs' offices efforts is enhanced by active participation on the part of citizens. 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 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." Still others take it for granted that someone else has already called. Always report suspicious activity and all crimes because police don't know there's a problem unless they are told.

Knowing What and How to Report

There are four general categories to consider when determining what to report: 1) suspicious activities, 2) people and vehicles; 3) illegal activities; and 4) unusual events or incidents, dangerous situations.

By reporting these types of activities and situations, citizens can make their communities safer and more secure, reduce violence, minimize victimization, reduce crime, and improve the overall quality of life. Community members must also be instructed on how to report suspicious activity. To report suspicious activities, crimes in progress, or possible terrorist activities, simply:

- Dial 9-1-1 and call the police department or sheriff's office.
- Tell the call taker what happened and the exact location.
- Provide a detailed description of individuals or vehicles.
- Remain on the phone and stay calm.
- Be prepared to answer follow-up questions.

One idea for a creative NW meeting is to visit the local 9-1-1 dispatch center. If someone is willing to take your Watch group or even the Area Coordinators and Block Captains around the center, community members will understand the fast pace of a 9-1-1 call center. This will emphasize the need for clear reports of suspicious activity. Some 9-1-1 centers won't accept non-emergency calls; they will give another number to call. During one of your first Watch meetings you should find out all the local numbers to call for non-emergency calls to the police. Only serious and legitimate calls should be made to 9-1-1, no matter what. Teach children how to respect the 9-1-1 system and how to use it if they are alone. Children learn by "doing" but practice on a toy phone only. Encourage them to be good citizens; help them learn to watch for trouble and how to get help when needed.

When you have an officer attend a meeting you might suggest they go over what happens to the information provided to 911 and when not to call 911.

When to Call 911 and When Not!

Calling 911 is an important communications tool for emergencies. However, some citizens call 911 in non-emergency situations. This can cause the dispatch operator to miss a call of a person needing help. It is important that not only your groups but all citizens understand when to call and when not to call 911.

When To Call

- Medical emergency (examples: chest pain, extreme shortness of breath, uncontrolled bleeding).
- Motor vehicle accident.
- Fire.
- When a life is in danger.

When Not to Call

- The power is off.
- Asking for directions to the hospital.
- Asking for telephone numbers of others.
- Requesting to speak with a particular officer.
- Inquiring as to the time and day.
- Inquiring about community activities and locations.

For more information about when it is appropriate to call, please contact the non-emergency number of your local law enforcement and ask for an officer to discuss the topic with you.

REMEMBER:

Community members only serve as the extra "eyes and ears" of law enforcement. They should report their observations of suspicious activities to law enforcement; however, citizens should never try to take action on those observations. Trained law enforcement should be the only ones ever to take action based on observations of suspicious activities.

Chapter 9

Basic Home Security

The original purpose of NW was to increase awareness in communities about ways to protect homes from burglaries. Although NW has expanded over the years, protecting homes is still a priority. Since most burglaries and thefts are crimes of opportunity, the more obstacles that we put in place to protect ourselves, the less the chance of our being victimized. In sports, the more defenses a team has, and the better that defense is, the less likely the opponent will be to score. In target hardening, we want to increase our “defense” by identifying multiple methods that you can employ to protect yourself and stop the criminal. Some are common sense methods that cost little or no time or effort, while others may be more complicated. The number of home burglaries is still high and community members should do everything possible to prevent burglaries. When a person falls victim to an attack on their home they feel vulnerable and usually do not recover the stolen property. Law enforcement can help citizens protect their property not just to keep crime rates low, but also to increase the likelihood of recovering stolen property.

Basic Home Target Hardening

Techniques

When developing a target hardening program to protect against home burglaries, law enforcement can suggest a variety of options. Target hardening can range from the purchase of elaborate alarm systems with every possible type of monitor, to buying a dog that announces

the arrival of anyone at your door. NSA offers a Target Hardening course through the Neighborhood Watch Toolkit, or you can contact your local law enforcement for assistance in developing strategies. These techniques are designed to assist homeowners in protecting their property by using simple, cost-effective crime prevention methods. These include using appropriate doors, locks, windows, lighting, appearance, alarms, and garages, and provide some helpful hints that range across several categories of safety and security.

Assessing the Structure

When scanning a home, you begin your home burglary risk assessment with the front door and work your way around the house. Start at the entryway of the house or apartment and observe the door, the locks, nearby windows, entry area lighting, and the general appearance of the home, as well as other features such as whether an alarm system is present. Next, move counterclockwise around to the side and back where you may encounter a garage, shed, or other areas that need to be secured.

Doors

As the primary point of entry for many burglars, the first item to inspect is the front door. Hollow-core or poorly fitting doors can mean trouble, as can front doors that are not equipped with proper deadbolt locks (at least one inch). All exterior doors should be metal or solid wood

and have strong door hinges on the inside of the door with hidden or non-removable pins. Officers should recommend homeowners install good quality deadbolt locks on all exterior doors and on any doors that open to attached garages.

Locks

Recommend homeowners install strong, reliable deadbolt locks extending at least one inch when in the locked position. They may also want to consider deadbolts with reinforced strike plates and extra long mounting screws to anchor the lock. Finally, if there is a change in home ownership, recommend all locks be changed immediately to avoid the possibility that extra keys to the house may be in the hands of unknown individuals. High quality security locks are available at most major market retailers and hardware stores.

Windows

After doors, windows are the next most-utilized access points, yet they are often overlooked by both law enforcers and citizens alike. Windows can be broken, pried open or lifted from their tracks, or can have their panes removed by thieves. It is important for your windows to have locks on them. Though placing nails or pins in a double hung window can be a fire hazard it can provide extra security when away. You might want to have a professional window expert come out and talk to you about the security of your windows or what you can do to make them more secure.

Lighting

Although lighting is often considered decorative, a well lit house can expose individuals attempting to conceal themselves and commit criminal acts. Officers should discuss the use of both interior and exterior lighting. A lighting audit should be completed after dark to be certain you are evaluating artificial illumination and not daylight. It is okay if the night is bright due to moonlight. At least two people will need to work together so you can check for things like color recognition/identification. Working in pairs is also a good idea for reasons of personal safety. In areas less lighted at night you might consider motion detector lighting or sensor lights.

Alarms

The mere presence of some alarm systems may deter potential burglars. Alarm company signs placed in the yard, stickers on the windows, and visible contacts or keypads are often enough to cause the average burglar to think twice before trying to break in. Since burglary is a crime of opportunity, the potential thief may decide to move on to a location that does not have an alarm system. There are many types of alarm systems on the market including monitored,

non-monitored, audible, wireless, sound-based, motion-based, etc. In many jurisdictions, alarm permits must be purchased and there may be penalties for false alarms. The purchase of an alarm system and its accompanying service or monitoring fees can be a major financial commitment, and is one that should be thoroughly researched by the homeowner.

Garages

When it comes to security, the garage is one area of the home that is commonly overlooked. Many garages have electronic garage door openers that give the homeowner a false feeling of security. Another often ignored element of the garage is the door that connects the garage to the house. If this door is not kept secure, then anyone entering the garage can enter the house. In order to increase garage security and house security, residents should always lock the doors connecting a home to an attached garage. They should not rely on an automatic garage door opener for security. At home, people should always park their cars in the garage with the garage door shut. If a burglar notices a pattern where the garage door is left open, or cars are normally parked in the driveway whenever someone is home, then a closed garage door or no cars in the driveway may be a giveaway that no one is home. Consistency in leaving the cars in the garage behind closed doors will keep from tipping off the burglar that the home is unoccupied. Besides, leaving the garage door open allows strangers to see whatever belongings are stored in the garage. It's a good idea for homeowners to install automatic openers that will allow them to stay in their cars until safely parked in the garage.

* For those without garages it is important that valuables are not left easily seen in the car and that the car is locked while in the driveway.

Exterior Appearances

Making sure your trees and bushes are trimmed and don't provide secluded shelter for a robber is important. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) refers to how to use various crime prevention techniques while maintaining or improving the appearance of the property. Some lessons borrowed from CPTED may include: using fences, walkways, and shrubs to direct visitor access; limit entry or call attention to individuals who have deviated from the designated pathway; planting thorny bushes around windows to make illegal entry more difficult; trimming shrubs and trees that could conceal criminals; cutting back tree limbs that might allow thieves to climb into windows; and using landscaping designs that provide maximum visibility to and from the house. Contact your law enforcement liaison to request an officer certified in CPTED to analyze the homes in your community.

Operation Identification (Operation ID)

Operation ID is a program where property is marked or engraved with a special number. This is called an owner-applied number (OAN) and it can be used to report stolen items. Operation ID has shown dramatic results in reducing burglaries and theft. Burglars usually avoid marked items because they are hard to re-sell.

- Mark valuables with driver's license number (DL) or state identification number (ID) or - for a business - state tax number (TX).
- To make sure nobody changes the OAN, put the two letters of your state at the start and end it with DL, ID, or TX - whichever applies.
- Never use your social security number. Don't engrave paintings, antiques, or any item you may want to sell.
- Hang Operation ID decals near your doors. This lets burglars know that property inside has been marked and won't be easy to re-sell.
- Decals and stickers may be available from police agencies or you can purchase them from the National Sheriffs' Association.

Engravers are inexpensive tools that can save you thousands of dollars. Pass the hat to buy a neighborhood engraver to share. If you sell engraved items, etch one line through your number so it's still readable. Initial it and give the buyer a bill of sale describing the item.

Property List

It's a good idea for community members to make a list of their property, including CDs, DVDs, videos, and any other collectible items. The list should be kept in a safe place. A list saved on the computer is no good if the burglars steal the computer too! People should take photos of expensive items, such as jewelry, and fill in a "Property Inventory Form" (available through Neighborhood Watch) to help police return any recovered property. Finally, it is imperative to remember that maintaining current and adequate insurance coverage is very important.



Reasons for Neighborhood Watch

Basic Crime Prevention

Practice crime safety measures that eliminate opportunities for criminals. Encourage others to join in crime prevention efforts. Aid others when they become victims of crime. Work for a better and safer neighborhood through protecting and honoring the rights of others.

Disaster Preparedness

Learn skills to prepare for man-made and natural disasters. Local, state, and the federal government do a lot to prepare for disasters but citizens have to be ready to care for each other. Encourage citizen involvement in preparation and planning.

Build a Stronger Community

Get to know your neighbors. In our fast-paced world we don't spend enough time learning about our neighbors. Watch groups give community members a reason to get together and talk about making their community a better place. Neighborhood Watch Activities are a fun way for community members to get to know each other while making a difference.

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