

Neighborhood Watch Tool Kit

*A guide to Starting, Organizing & Maintaining Your Neighborhood
Crime Watch*



What is a Neighborhood Crime Watch?

Crime Watch is an organization that helps residents in a particular neighborhood: prevent or reduce crime, develop positive relationships with law enforcement, and become the “eyes and ears” for police. At Crime Watch meetings, residents discuss concerns for safety and plan potential solutions. It’s a great way to get to know your neighbors, which enhances everyone’s safety in the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Crime Watches Can:

- Forge bonds among residents
- Improve relationships between residents and police
- Teach citizens how to avoid being victimized
- Train citizens to recognize and report suspicious behavior
- Help reduce crimes like burglaries and thefts

Neighborhood Crime Watches are NOT:

- Vigilante forces working outside the normal procedures of law enforcement
- Designed for citizens to take personal risks to prevent crime
- A 100% guarantee that crime will not occur in your neighborhood

5 Step Process: There is an easy process to start up a Neighborhood Watch group

1. Select coordinator
2. Select block captains
3. Organize “Watch Members”
4. Discuss crime issues and prevention
5. Hold get-togethers such as pot luck dinners and block parties

What are Crime Watch Roles & Responsibilities?

Roles and Responsibilities within a Crime Watch group can and will vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, and often depend on the number of volunteers. Here are some examples you might consider:

Neighborhood Coordinator

- Coordinates activities of block captains and watch members
- Recruits neighbors into the Crime Watch program
- Acts as a liaison with the police department and the neighborhood
- Distributes information to residents (web, email, social media, flyers)
- Plans and conducts crime watch meetings as needed
- Develops communications systems and maintains a phone/email tree

Block Captain

- Hosts a Crime Watch Meeting for people in the neighborhood
- Recruits neighbors by visiting homes, announcing meetings, and encouraging neighbors to participate
- Distributes crime prevention materials as necessary
- Promotes crime watch meetings, events and special activities

Neighborhood Watch Member

- Is alert; acts as “eyes and ears” for their neighbors, and reports suspicious activity
- Studies crime prevention materials
- Checks neighbors’ homes when they are out of town
- Assists Block Captain and Coordinator with spreading the word about crime prevention methods

FAQ's

How does the Winchester Police Department help with Neighborhood Crime Watch?

All crime prevention programs are provided free of charge. Our Community Relations/Crime Prevention Specialist can assist with organizing Neighborhood Watch Meetings. They can help review crime trends and secure speakers and/or presentations.

How does my neighborhood get Crime Watch signs?

Signs and installation may be available free of charge, and occasionally, the Neighborhood Crime Watch group may be required to assist in funding. WPD must officially recognize a Crime Watch organization before assisting with signage.

We have a group going. Now what?

1. Exchange basic info. with trusted neighbors: home and work telephone numbers, daily routine, planned vacations, scheduled deliveries, etc.
2. Report any unusual or suspicious activities to the Winchester Police Department by calling 911. Don't hesitate to call – there is a direct connection between an increase in calls for service and a reduction in crime!
3. Keep neighbors informed of houses that will be unoccupied for extended periods of time.
4. Look after neighbors' houses when they are away. Volunteer to collect their mail, newspapers and other deliveries. A stack of newspapers is a good indication no one is home, and could be a target for crime!
5. Consider establishing a regularly scheduled email newsletter
6. Let the police apprehend criminals. NEVER PUT YOURSELF IN DANGER!

What is Suspicious Activity?

- Someone screaming or shouting for help
- Door-to-door canvassers in a residential area- especially if they go into the back yard or split up
- People waiting in front of a home when the occupants are not home, or loitering in front of a business that is closed
- Someone looking in windows of houses and parked cars
- Person running without workout clothes – especially if he or she is carrying something of value
- Cars, vans, or trucks moving slowly with no apparent destination or without lights
- Anyone being forced into a vehicle
- A stranger sitting in a car or stopping to talk to a child
- Unusual noises – gunshots, abnormally barking dogs – anything which suggests foul play or illegal activity
- Person exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms. The person may be injured, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or in need of medical attention

Tips for Reporting Suspicious Activity:

Call the Winchester Police Department. Dial 911 for emergency, or call the non-emergency number at (540) 662-4131.

1. Make note of the descriptions of suspicious persons or vehicles. Write down (or take picture) of the license plate number. Take note of the color of the vehicle, the time, the direction of travel.
2. Describe the suspect in detail:
 - Male or Female
 - Race
 - Approximate age

- Body type, estimated weight
 - Hair color
 - Clothing – color of shirt, hat, shoes, etc.
 - Distinctive characteristics such as beard, mustache, scars, tattoos, or accents
3. Identify yourself by your name and address and relay the information.
Example: I'm Jane Smith of 123 Smith Street, a member of the Neighborhood Watch. There is a suspicious person prowling around my neighbor's house at 125 Smith Street. He's wearing a white shirt, orange baseball cap and brown shorts.
 4. If something is active, like a burglar is in your home or your neighbor's home, be sure to use the words "In Progress".
 5. Remain on the phone with the dispatcher until all of the necessary information has been obtained.
 6. Do not try to confront the situation. Wait for police to arrive.

Remember: Being alert to what is happening in your neighborhood is not involving yourself in other people's business or being nosy, it is guarding against any situation which could be a threat to your neighborhood. Don't worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. It is better to think of what could happen if you didn't act.

Top 10 Tips for a Safe Home

1. Lock doors and windows
2. Crime-proof outside areas
3. Get to know your neighbors
4. Consider an alarm
5. Protect yourself with lock and key
6. Protect your home when traveling
7. Protect your valuables
8. Teach home safety to your kids
9. Have an emergency plan
10. Take a stand – Join a Neighborhood Watch group

What else can I do to get involved?

Join the Citizen's Police Academy – the 10-week program provides Winchester residents with an inside look at law enforcement operations and challenges. Participants will learn about various aspects of the department, including: patrol, criminal investigations, dispatch and 911 operations, narcotics, victim witness program, court procedures, and much more. Graduates are eligible to become a member of the Volunteer in Policing (VIP) program.

Current Neighborhood Watch groups in the City of Winchester

- **The North End Neighborhood Watch** - meets the third Monday of every other month at the Douglass Community Learning Center at 7:00 p.m.

Includes Kent St. to Fairview Ave. between National Ave. and Green St.

- **The Woodland Avenue Neighborhood Watch** – meets on the second Wednesday every other month in the Community Room at the Timbrook Public Safety Center at 7:00 p.m.

Includes areas between National Ave./Orchard Ave. and Berryville Ave.

- **The Northside Neighborhood Watch** – meets on the last Monday of every other month at a home on West Oates Avenue at 7:00 p.m.

Includes Pennsylvania Ave. and N. Loudoun Street near W. commercial St.

Take a stand against crime. Join Neighborhood Watch!

For more information, contact: Jennifer Hall, Community Relations & Crime Prevention Specialist at (540) 545-7548 or Jennifer.Hall@Winchesterva.gov

