

# An Introduction to Neighborhood Watch

## Introduction

Join the Fairfax County Police Department in preventing crime in your neighborhood by becoming a member of the Neighborhood Watch program. Neighborhood Watch began in 1979 and has flourished steadily with hundreds of established community-based programs throughout the county. The success of Neighborhood Watch is due to the cooperative involvement of police and citizens. By donating a small amount of time to observe and report suspicious activity in your neighborhood, we can band together to effectively reduce crime in our community.

The objective of Neighborhood Watch is to organize resident to be alert to potential crime in the neighborhood and keep a watchful eye on their neighbors' homes. This brochure will explain the program elements

Crime prevention officers can assist you in developing security measures for your own home. You can receive a free home security survey and take property identification measures in order to help prevent a burglar from choosing your home as a target. Neighborhood Watch signs are provided to every neighborhood that has an active Neighborhood Watch.

Thanks to many thousands of concerned citizens in Fairfax County, our Neighborhood Watch program is a proven success. It is one of the largest such programs in the country and has received national and international recognition.



# Three ways to get involve in your safety

## 1. BE INVOLVED

The purpose of Neighborhood Watch is to use citizen observers to deter crime. Members report crimes and suspicious situations to the police. They participate in educating their community in public safety practices. Members act as the eyes and ears of their community on a regular basis to watch their neighborhood and report anything suspicious to the Fairfax County Police Department. Thieves and vandals are likely to go elsewhere when they know Neighborhood Watch is “all eyes” for them! Contact the Crime Prevention Officer at your police district station for assistance in organizing a Neighborhood Watch in your neighborhood.

## 2. FREE HOME SECURITY INSPECTION

A qualified, trained Fairfax County police officer or auxiliary officer will inspect the locks, doors and windows of your home with you. Exterior lighting, landscaping and other factors affecting the protection of your home from burglary also will be reviewed. The officer will make recommendations for improving your home security. You can arrange for a free inspection at your convenience by calling your district station’s Crime Prevention Officer.

## 3. PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION

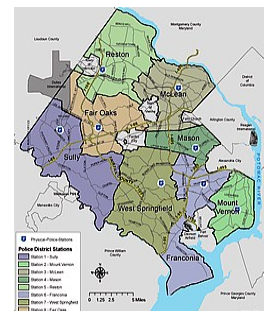
A Fairfax County police officer will instruct you on how to properly mark your property so it can be identified and how to make an inventory of your valuables. Property identification discourages thieves and makes fencing of stolen property more difficult. When recovered stolen property can be identified, it can be used as evidence against the thief and also returned to its owner by police.

Recording serial numbers, using an ultra violet pen to mark property and micro dot identification are all simple ways to protect your property. Ask your crime prevention officer for more information about property identification.

## Fairfax County Crime Prevention on the Web

Each of the eight Fairfax County Police District Stations has a webpage with station specific crime trends and information for the residents of their district. You will find your district stations webpage at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/stations](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/stations).

You can become a fan of the Fairfax County Police Department on Facebook to follow the goings-on in the county on a regular basis. Fairfax County Crime Solvers also has a Facebook page.



# The Benefits of Neighborhood Watch

Some neighborhoods may be more susceptible to crime than others; however, all should consider establishing a Neighborhood Watch Program. No matter what type of neighborhood you live in condominium, garden apartment, townhome, or single family home, the benefits are obvious. They include:

## PREVENTION OF CRIME

Fairfax County crime statistics show Neighborhood Watch Programs aided the police department in reducing residential burglary by almost 60 percent from 1980 to 1993. This occurred even while the population increased by almost 250,000 people. In addition to reductions in residential burglary, Neighborhood Watch Programs have contributed to substantial declines in thefts of property, vandalism, fraud, sexual assaults and even traffic-related offenses. Watch Programs have even impacted upon crimes in nearby commercial areas, churches and schools.

The establishment of a Neighborhood Watch Program in a low-crime area is added assurance it will remain safe. Crime is rarely stationary and often moves from one neighborhood to another.

## GREATER AWARENESS OF CRIME

Home security and personal safety are enhanced as residents become more aware of the threat of crime. Exposure to crime prevention techniques improves a citizen's ability to remove and reduce opportunities for criminals to act.

## ENHANCED REPORTING OF SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITIES

Residents are more aware of who belongs in the community and are more inclined to report suspicious persons and activities to the police. Typically, as the calls for suspicious activities increase, the actual number of crimes committed decrease.

## SERVES AS A WARNING TO CRIMINALS

Neighborhood Watch signs alert criminals that residents are concerned about crime and will call the police when suspicious activity is observed. However, signs alone are of little deterrent value when not backed up by an active Neighborhood Watch Program.

## PROMOTES NEIGHBORLINESS

Neighborhood Watch encourages residents to interact with each other, sharing information about work schedules, vacation plans, types of vehicles belonging to their households, etc. It also encourages neighbors to observe the property of others and occasionally attend meetings to strengthen neighborhood safety and security.

## ACCESS TO CRIME DATA

Crime often moves from one neighborhood to another. Obviously, it is important for neighborhoods to be informed about crime trends that may threaten them. Crime Prevention Officers can help identify trends and patterns through crime analysis and routinely notify Neighborhood Watch Coordinators of crime-related problems.

## INCREASES ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

The Neighborhood Watch Program serves as a network through which the Police Department can collect and disseminate information on crime. Although most Watch members should realistically expect to see little in the way of real crime, the possible benefits of Neighborhood Watch to both citizens and the criminal justice system are proven everyday.

# Starting a Neighborhood Watch

Unlike many law enforcement services, Neighborhood Watch can be initiated by citizens. Circumstances which serve as a catalyst for programs usually include:

- A neighborhood is victimized by burglary, vandalism or other crimes.
- Citizens perceive that there is a neighborhood crime problem even though there may have been only a few isolated incidents.
- Because of positive publicity about Neighborhood Watch and its successes, residents determine they should participate in the program.
- After crime analysis, the police department determines a residential neighborhood is experiencing a disproportionate amount of crime.

## Planning

Frequently, the planning phase of the Neighborhood Watch is overlooked. All too often programs begin with a mass meeting at which the benefits of Neighborhood Watch are detailed. Although those in attendance are motivated by the potential for preventing crime, they are often confused about how to organize to achieve the desired results. Therefore, it is extremely important to establish a working foundation in order to enhance organization and program longevity.

## Organizing a Watch Program

Even though Neighborhood Watch is a relatively simple concept of preventing neighborhood crime, it requires organization to make it work. Without strong organization, members often lose interest after the crime problem has diminished. Once interest has waned, it becomes difficult to regenerate interest and action.

## Responsibilities of a Neighborhood Watch Coordinator

- Serve as liaison between the police department's Crime Prevention Officer and the community; the coordinator is responsible for disseminating information from the police department to the community.
- Provide reports to the civic associations if one exists.
- Maintain a master list of all Watch members.
- Work with the community to develop specific crime prevention projects for the neighborhood.
- Attend police district coordinators' meetings scheduled by the Crime Prevention Officer.

## Role of the Police Department

Involvement of the Police Department in a Neighborhood Watch Program typically includes:

- Providing initial training of Watch coordinator and committee members.
- Maintaining contact with Watch coordinator.
- Notifying coordinator of any crime trends or patterns that may threaten the neighborhood.
- Meeting with Neighborhood Watch committee on a periodic basis to address crime problems and plan strategies.
- Provide ongoing Neighborhood Watch and crime awareness training to residents.
- Serve as a resource for acquiring speakers for meetings, obtaining handout materials and visual aids, and providing signs.

# Types of Neighborhood Watch Programs

## Types of Neighborhood Watch Programs

Neighborhood Watch is simply a crime prevention concept that calls for citizens to watch out for their neighbors' property. Knowing this, criminals are generally unwilling to risk detection, so they either don't commit the crime or go elsewhere.

Because neighborhoods are different in terms of geography, population, and the extent and nature of crime, Neighborhood Watch programs must vary from area to area if they are to be successful. Whereas criminals may be dissuaded from committing a crime in one neighborhood using passive observation, they may be willing to take the risk in a more rural community using the same basic strategy.

Some of the basic program variations include:

### Passive Observation

Passive observation is an activity residents must always be involved in. Residents must always be on the lookout for suspicious or unusual activity.

### Window Watch

A scheduled activity, window watchers should set a routine to follow. Whether checking every 15 minutes or more or less often, they should be aware of the responsibility to make an effort to stay to their routine. Window watchers are often residents housebound for reasons of health, advanced age, disability, being a single parent or being a primary caregiver in the home.

### Walking Patrols

Many Neighborhood Watch programs assign residents to walk within a several block area to actively look for suspicious activities. Active, scheduled, patrols should be done in pairs when possible (i.e., husband and wife or two neighbors). Upon observing suspicious activities, walking patrols are to contact the police either by using a cell phone, or as soon as possible if a cell phone is not readily available. Patrol members are cautioned against personal intervention or confrontation. Unique decals on residents' vehicles are helpful in identifying vehicles that belong in the neighborhood. Obtaining and issuing decals should be the responsibility of the local civic or homeowners' association.

### Mobile Patrols

Such patrols are frequently used in larger communities or where homes are spaced a considerable distance from one another, making window watch and foot patrols impractical. Patrols should be done in pairs when possible.

### Communication

One of the most important parts of a Neighborhood Watch is a system of communications. This can be done in many ways based on the needs and abilities of a community. The ability to get information out to the broadest cross section of a community is vital for the Neighborhood Watch mission, to increase the likelihood of timely reporting and the prevention of crime. How this is done is best determined by the members of the specific community. Some options are, e-mail distribution group (maintained by the coordinator), list serve, phone trees, private ISP (internet service provider) user group, private (password protected) community web site or electronic or paper newsletter. The ability to get the word out to the community coupled with at least one of the other Neighborhood Watch layers, will greatly improve the effectiveness of your Watch program.

**NOTE: Neighborhood Watch is designed to prevent, detect and report crimes. Enforcement action is always left to the Police Department.**

# How do you contact the Police

Use the police, fire and rescue emergency number, 9-1-1, for crimes in progress and events which are life-threatening or immediately resulting in property damage. Call the non-emergency number, 703-691-2131, to report crimes which already occurred and when the suspect is no longer in the area and to advise police of suspicious activity that you have observed. On-line reporting ([www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police)) and Citizen Reporting Service (CRS) are the Fairfax County Police Departments newest methods of reporting to police.

On-line and CRS reports can be made for the following types of incidents:

- Alcohol Violations
- Civil Disputes
- Destruction of Property
- Disorderly Conduct
- Larceny up to \$5,000
- Loitering
- Lost Property
- Noise Violations
- Police Service
- Solicitor Violations
- Suspicious Events/Persons/Vehicles
- Trespassing
- Telephone Harassment/Threats
- Vehicle Tampering

*“It has been proven that in neighborhoods where citizens have joined together to look out for each other’s safety, the incidence of burglaries and other crimes against property have been significantly reduced.”*

For more information about on-line reporting or to make an on-line report go to [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/crs](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/crs)

## WHAT INFORMATION THE POLICE NEED

You will be asked for your name, address and phone number. This information is requested in case additional contact with you is necessary, but you do not have to provide this information. If you wish, you may provide us with just a call back number we can use if our initial information was wrong or the situation has changed before an officer arrives. Any information provided to the police department is kept in confidence. If you do not want personal contact with the responding officer, say so.

The most important information needed by the police is:

- What happened
- When
- Where
- If anyone is hurt
- License numbers and vehicle descriptions
- Direction of travel
- Description(s) of suspect(s)
- If there are weapons involved

By acting quickly and calmly, your request for police service could foil a crime, help to identify suspects involved in other crimes, or deter a criminal act by letting potential suspects know that you and your neighbors are alert to suspicious activity in your community.

# Reporting Suspicious Activity

Successful efforts to combat crime require the cooperative involvement of police and citizens. The police cannot be everywhere. For this reason, success against crime is dependent on citizen participation. Many crimes would not be committed if more citizens were alert to suspicious activity and notified the police.

## WHEN YOU SHOULD CALL THE POLICE

Whenever you observe suspicious events, even though you may not be the only person observing them, call the police. If you think you should call the police, then make the call. The police would rather get numerous calls on the same event than none at all.

Often citizens fail to call because they are not sure if what they see is suspicious. If you are in doubt, call the police immediately. Don't wait to talk it over with friends or neighbors. Valuable police response time is lost this way.

Don't be concerned about bothering us because you won't. Don't dwell on possible embarrassment if your call should prove to be unfounded. Think instead of what could have happened had you not called. You or your loved ones could become the victims of a criminal act.

## WHAT IS SUSPICIOUS?

- A stranger enters your neighbor's home while your neighbor is away or someone enters your neighbor's yard with no apparent lawful purpose; anyone trying to open a neighbor's door; a moving truck or van pulled up to a neighbor's home while they are gone. Remember, burglaries often occur at times when they should be most obvious - in broad daylight, in full view of observers with no effort at subterfuge.
- Someone carrying property such as television sets, radios, stereos, etc., at an unusually late hour or in an unusual place, especially if it does not appear that the property is newly purchased.
- The sound of shattering glass could signal a possible burglary, vandalism or larceny in progress.
- Anyone peering into vehicles while walking down a street or someone removing tags, gasoline or parts from a car; someone attempting to enter a car using a coat hanger or other device. Never assume that it is the owner who has locked the keys in the car. Be suspicious of anyone tampering with the hood or trunk of a car.
- An improperly parked car or an abandoned vehicle, or someone leaving one car and driving away in another - these may be signs of a stolen vehicle.
- Anyone being forced into a vehicle could be the victim of a possible abduction.
- Persons loitering around schools, parks and isolated areas, or in the neighborhood. Loiterers could be possible sex offenders or burglars.
- Anyone on school, church, or cemetery property after dark and not taking part in an approved activity.
- Business transactions conducted from a vehicle and often involving juveniles, a steady flow of strangers to and from a particular home on a regular basis at unusual times or late hours. This could indicate drug sales or a fencing operation.
- Offers of goods or repair work at unusually low prices could indicate stolen property or some kind of fraud.
- All fights, screams and loud noises (such as explosions) should be reported as the events are taking place.
- Door-to-door solicitors without properly issued licenses. They could be vending illegally or they could be casing houses in your neighborhood.

**SULLY DISTRICT STATION**

4900 Stonecroft Boulevard  
Chantilly, VA 20151  
703-814-7000 Main  
703-814-7018 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [SulCPO@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:SulCPO@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**MCLEAN DISTRICT STATION**

1437 Balls Hill Road  
McLean, VA 22101  
703-556-7750 Main  
703-734-0756 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [cpo.mclean@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:cpo.mclean@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**RESTON DISTRICT STATION**

12000 Bowman Towne Drive  
Reston, VA 20190  
703-478-0904 Main  
703-478-0799 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [RestonCPO@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:RestonCPO@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**WEST SPRINGFIELD DISTRICT STATION**

6140 Rolling Road  
Springfield, VA 22152  
703-644-7377 Main  
703-644-5026 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [wspcpo@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:wspcpo@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**MOUNT VERNON DISTRICT STATION**

2511 Parkers Lane  
Alexandria, VA 22306  
703-360-8400 Main  
703-360-8928 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [mtvcpo@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:mtvcpo@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**MASON DISTRICT STATION**

6507 Columbia Pike  
Annandale, VA 22003  
703-256-8035 Main  
703-354-5889 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [NW.mason@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:NW.mason@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**FRANCONIA DISTRICT STATION**

6121 Franconia Road  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
703-922-0889 Main  
703-922-8263 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [fracpo@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:fracpo@fairfaxcounty.gov)

**FAIR OAKS DISTRICT STATION**

12300 Lee Jackson Memorial Highway  
Fairfax, VA 22033  
703-591-0966 Main  
703-352-2163 Crime Prevention  
e-mail [faocpo@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:faocpo@fairfaxcounty.gov)



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