

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH GUIDE

AN ALERT COMMUNITY IS A SAFE COMMUNITY



Neighborhood Watch is one of the most effective and least costly ways to prevent crime and reduce fear in the community by forging bonds between area residents and local law enforcement.

www.asm.ca.gov/Bigelow

“Crime & Fear

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

Neighborhood Watch is an effective tool you and your neighbors can use to break this vicious cycle and in the process, build your community into a safer, friendlier place to live. The program relies on the best crime-fighting tool ever created – a good neighbor.

This booklet explains how to work with local law enforcement and community leaders to start and sustain your own Neighborhood Watch for your community.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact my District Office at 209-223-9140.

It is an honor to represent you in the State Assembly. ”



Frank Bigelow

—Frank Bigelow
Assemblyman, 5th District

The Basics

What is a Neighborhood Watch?

Neighborhood Watch is one of the most effective and least costly ways to prevent crime and reduce fear in the community by forging bonds between area residents and local law enforcement.

- Any community resident can join – young and old, single and married, renter and homeowner.
- A few concerned residents, a community organization, or a law enforcement agency can spearhead the effort to organize a program.
- You can form a group around any geographical unit: a neighborhood, a block, an apartment building, a community park, a business area – almost anything.

Why take part in a Neighborhood Watch?

As extra eyes and ears for the community, members can learn how to make their homes more secure, watch out for each other and the neighborhood, and report activities that raise their suspicions to the police or sheriff's office.

- Today's lifestyles can contribute to residential isolation and weaken communities.
- By staying vigilant, neighbors can stop criminal activity by preventing it from happening before it begins.
- You and your neighbors are the ones who really know what is going on in your neighborhood.

What makes a Neighborhood Watch work?

A Neighborhood Watch is successful when community members and local law enforcement are actively engaged in keeping an eye on our streets and parks. These partnerships are a powerful deterrent to crime in the community. A Neighborhood Watch works when citizens:

- Hold regular meetings to get to know neighbors and decide program strategies.
- Connect with other community organizations to build support.
- Convince government to listen and respond to community needs.
- Share information quickly between area residents.
- Know the ins and outs of their neighborhoods.
- Raise awareness by holding community events.

Getting Started

- **Talk with your neighbors.**
 - Go door-to-door to gauge interest in starting a program.
 - Form a small planning committee to discuss community needs and possible challenges.
 - Consider linking with an existing organization, such as a community development office, tenants' association, or housing authority.

- **Contact local law enforcement.**
 - Invite officers to attend your initial meeting.
 - Find out about successful Neighborhood Watches in your area.
 - Ask about local crime problems in your neighborhood.

- **Organize a first official meeting.**
 - Set a date and time at least one week before your meeting.
 - Select a meeting place accessible to all residents such as a home, a school, a park, or a business.
 - Flyer your neighborhood and follow up with phone calls to residents the day of the meeting.

- **Select a block captain.**
 - Designate a liaison between the Neighborhood Watch and law enforcement. This person will:
 - Take responsibility for determining meeting times and locations.
 - Maintain a list of residents participating in the program.

Community Activities

• Neighborhood Clean-up

- o Residents join together to pick up litter from the streets, adopt a local park, clean up sidewalks, remove overgrown weeds, paint over graffiti, and organize other projects. Supplies are usually available through your local law enforcement agency.

• Home Security

- o Schedule a meeting focused on securing homes and discussing unique problems in your area. Invite local law enforcement to provide tips about locking doors and windows and ensuring homes have adequate lighting. Also encourage them to discuss personal safety tips, gangs, child safety, and drug houses.

• Protecting Personal Property

- o Encourage residents to mark their property for easy identification in the event the property is stolen or lost. Local law enforcement may be able to provide engraving pens and materials to put identification numbers on personal property.

• Block Parents

- o Identify homes where children know they can go for help if their own parents are not home. Place Neighborhood Watch signs in the windows of selected houses so that kids can easily find them.

Sustaining a Neighborhood Watch

Once established, it is important to remain proactive in supporting your group's mission and promoting your work in the community.

- Organize regular meetings that focus on current issues such as drug abuse, crime in schools, childcare before and after school, recreational activities for young people, and victim services.
- Arrange community patrols to walk around streets or apartment complexes to alert police to crime and suspicious activities.
- Encourage residents to always be on the alert for unusual or suspicious behavior. They should call local authorities immediately, if warranted, and write down descriptions of the person(s) and license plate number(s) of any vehicles that are involved.
- Know when neighbors are not at home or on vacation and likewise, let neighbors know when you will be gone for long periods of time.
- Publish a newsletter that includes crime prevention tips and local news, recognition of residents who have made a difference, and highlights community events.
- Host social events that give neighbors a chance to get to know one another – a block party, potluck dinner, volleyball or softball game, picnic, etc.

Reporting a Crime

Your help and eyewitness account can be key to solving crimes in the neighborhood. Remember the following tips when making a report to law enforcement.

Call the police/sheriff immediately. Every minute that passes reduces the chance that a criminal will be caught.

Tell the police/sheriff as much as you can. No fact is too trivial. In many cases, it is what the victims and witnesses tell law enforcement about the criminal that results in an arrest. You may be asked the following when reporting crime:

- How many suspects were there and can you describe them?
- Can you describe their vehicles? What was/were the license plate number(s)? Which way did they go?
- What did they do? What did they say? What did they take?

Immediate responses are not always possible from police or sheriff's offices, due to limited resources and personnel. They must prioritize calls based on the potential threat to human life. Law enforcement will get to you as soon as possible, but do not attempt to confront or detain suspect(s) on your own.

Suspicious Activity

As active community members, you know best when something unusual is happening in your neighborhood or is occurring at an odd time of day. These can be indicators of criminal activity.

Obvious things to watch for:

- o A stranger entering a neighbor's house when it is unoccupied.
- o Anyone removing accessories, license plates, or gas from a car.
- o Anyone peering into parked cars.
- o Persons entering or leaving a business place after hours.
- o A sound of breaking glass or loud explosive noises.
- o Persons loitering around schools, parks and secluded areas.
- o Persons loitering in the neighborhood who do not live there.
- o Anyone forcing entry into, or tampering with a residence, or vehicle.

Suspicious Activity (Continued)

Not-so-obvious things to watch for:

- **Strangers and Solicitors.**
 - Check identification of all solicitors, meter readers and repairmen before allowing them to enter your home. Be suspicious of alleged deliverymen with a wrong address or asking if someone lives there.
- **Someone going door-to-door in your neighborhood.**
 - Pay attention. If you notice the individual repeatedly tries to open locked doors, peer through windows, or enter backyards, call the police immediately.
- **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.
- **Continuous repair operations at non-business locations.**
 - Could mean stolen property is being stripped, repainted, or otherwise altered.
- **Persons quickly changing vehicles.**
 - May be attempting to elude the police or abandoning a stolen vehicle.
- **Someone carrying property at an unusual hour, especially if it does not look newly purchased.**
 - If it is an unusual hour they could be lookouts for a burglary in progress.
- **One or more youth walking through the neighborhood looking into automobiles or backyards.**
- **Any person taking a shortcut through a backyard.**
- **An abandoned vehicle parked on your block.**

Developing An Action Plan

A Process for Developing Your Action Plan



Suspect Description Form

Sex: Race: Age: Height: Weight:

Hair:

Color: Length: Type: Style: Sideburns:

Eyes:

Color: Glasses: Type:

Face:

Complexion: 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/Tie or Blouse: Pants:

Skirt: Dress:

Shoes: Stocking:

Gloves: Jewelry:

Purse:

Weapons:

Handgun/Knife, etc.:

Important Phone Numbers

Emergency Fire, Police or Ambulance: Call 911

Your Local Law Enforcement Representative (Name)

Home Phone

Work Phone

Name

Address

Home Phone

Work Phone

Children's Names

Important Information

Sheriff's Offices in the 5th Assembly District

Alpine County Sheriff's Office

14777 State Route 89
Markleeville, CA 96120
Phone: 530-694-2231

Amador County Sheriff's Office

700 Court Street
Jackson, CA 95642
Phone: 209-223-6500

Calaveras County Sheriff's Office

891 Mountain Ranch Road
San Andreas, CA 95249
Phone: 209-754-6500

El Dorado County Sheriff's Office

300 Fair Lane
Placerville, CA 95667
Phone: 530-621-5655

Mariposa County Sheriff's Office

5099 Old Highway
Mariposa, CA 95338
Phone: 209-966-3615

Madera County Sheriff's Headquarters

14143 Road 28
Madera, CA 93638
Phone: 559-675-7770

Mono County Sheriff's Office

49 Bryant Street
Bridgeport, CA 93517
Phone: 760-932-7549

Placer County Sheriff's Department

2929 Richardson Drive
Auburn, CA 95603
Phone: 530-889-7800

Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office

28 North Lower Sunset Drive
Sonora, CA 95370
Phone: 209-533-5855

“An effective Neighborhood Watch is one of the best strategies for keeping our communities safe. I encourage everyone to get involved and help prevent crime in our neighborhoods.”



Assemblyman
Frank Bigelow
5th District



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