

Developing Citizen Awareness Through Crime Prevention Programs

Monthly meetings of your NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH group should be utilized for programs to develop citizen awareness and proper response to suspected or actual criminal activity. Speakers from law enforcement as well as from a wide range of community organizations are valuable resources for this training:

- Recognizing suspicious activity;
- Describing and reporting events, vehicles and persons;
- Home security inspections;
- Home security measures;
- Telephone security;
- Confrontations with intruders.

Recognizing Suspicious Activity

BE ALERT. Anything that seems slightly "out of place" or is occurring at an unusual time of day could be criminal activity. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO APPREHEND A PERSON COMMITTING A CRIME OR INVESTIGATE A SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY.** Call the police or sheriff's department immediately, and do not worry about being embarrassed if your suspicions prove to be unfounded. Law enforcement officers would rather investigate than be called when it is too late.

The following incidents **MAY** indicate possible criminal activity and should be reported:

- Continuous repair operations at a nonbusiness location (stolen property being altered);
- Open or broken doors and windows at a closed business or unoccupied residence (burglary or vandalism);
- Unusual noises, such as gunshots, screaming, or dogs barking continuously (burglary, assault, or rape);
- Sound of breaking glass (burglary or vandalism);
- A person exhibiting unusual mental or physical symptoms (person may be injured, under the influence of drugs, or otherwise needing medical attention).

Time and accuracy are critical in reporting crime or suspicious events. Use your law enforcement agency's emergency number to report life-threatening incidents or a crime in progress, and use the non-emergency number for crimes that have already occurred. Your call could save a life, prevent an injury, or stop a crime. The information you provide will be kept confidential. You do not need to give your name, although this is often helpful.

Suspicious Persons

Obviously, not every stranger who comes into a neighborhood is a criminal. Legitimate door-to-door sales and repair people appear in residential areas frequently. Occasionally, however, criminals disguise themselves as these workers; therefore, it is important to be alert to the activities of all nonresidents. Law enforcement officials should be called to investigate persons in the following circumstances, who may be suspects in the crimes indicated:

- Going door to door in a residential area, especially if one or more goes to rear of residence or loiters in front of an unoccupied house or closed business (burglary);
- Forcing entrance or entering an unoccupied house (burglary, theft, or trespassing);
- Running, especially if carrying something of value or carrying unwrapped property at an unusual hour (fleeing the scene of a crime);
- Heavy traffic to and from a residence, particularly if it occurs on a daily basis (drug dealing, vice or fence operation);
- Screaming (rape or assault);
- Loitering around or peering into cars, especially in parking lots or on streets (car theft);
- Loitering around schools, parks or secluded areas (sex offender);
- Offering items for sale at a very low price (trying to sell stolen property);
- Loitering or driving through a neighborhood several times or appearing as delivery person with a wrong address (burglary).

Suspicious Vehicles

Vehicles in the following situations MAY be involved in crimes and should be reported to authorities:

- Slow moving, without lights, following aimless course in any location, including residential streets, schools, and playgrounds (burglar, drug pusher, or sex offender);
- Parked or occupied, containing one or more persons, especially at an unusual hour (lookouts for a burglary or robbery);
- Parked by a business or unoccupied residence, being loaded with valuables (burglary or theft);
- Abandoned in your neighborhood (stolen car);
- Containing weapons (criminal activity);
- Someone, especially a female or juvenile, being forced into a vehicle (kidnapping, assault, or attempted rape);
- Business transactions taking place in it, especially around schools or parks (sale of stolen items or drugs);
- Persons detaching mechanical parts or accessories from it (theft or vandalism);
- Objects being thrown from it (disposing of contraband).

Describing and Reporting of Events, Vehicles and Persons

Practicing to develop skill in providing quick, accurate descriptions is an excellent NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH meeting activity. In attempting to describe events, vehicles, or persons, write down the details of what you have observed while they are still fresh in your mind, so your descriptions to law enforcement officials will be as accurate as possible.

Describing Events

When describing events, write down:

- What happened;
- When it happened;
- Where it occurred (note the nearest cross street, home address, or landmark in relationship to the event);
- Whether injuries are involved (Be prepared to report visible or suspected personal injury. Be as specific as possible - this could save a life!);

- Whether weapons are involved (this information, whether observed or suspected, is vital to responding officers).

Describing Vehicles

When describing vehicles, write down:

- Vehicle license number and state, make and type of vehicle, color, and approximate age;
- Special designs or unusual features, such as vinyl top, mag wheels, body damage, pinstripes, etc.;
- Direction of travel.

Describing Persons

In preparing descriptions of persons, it is important to write down the following:

- Sex;
- Race;
- Age;
- Height (estimated from eye contact level measured against your height);
- Weight;
- Hair (color and length);
- Hat;
- Facial Hair (beard/mustache);
- Shirt/tie;
- Coat/jacket;
- Trousers;
- Shoes;

- Any peculiar or distinguishable mannerisms, physical disabilities, disfigurements, scars or tattoos;
- Voice characteristics;
- Direction of movement.

Home Security Inspections

One of the most effective ways to educate NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH participants to protect their property is to arrange for detailed security inspections of their homes. Your crime prevention officer can assist you in the effort and can provide WATCH members with home security inspection checklists so that preliminary surveys can be conducted by homeowners or block captain.

Volunteer inspectors should be carefully screened before being admitted to the program; they should receive intensive training and be required to make a detailed report on each inspection. It might be wise to have homeowners sign a disclaimer relative to these inspections.

Home Security Measures

You must be aware of the potential risk of crime in your home in order to prevent it. First...Remember that the key factor in most crimes is OPPORTUNITY. IF THEY CAN'T GET AT IT, THEY CAN'T TAKE IT! Then...follow a regular plan of home security to deter the potential burglar or other intruder.

- Use a timer or photo electric cell that automatically turns a living room light on at dusk, particularly if you are going to be away at that time;
- Leave a radio on with the volume turned low when leaving home, even for short periods;
- Always close and lock garage doors;
- Secure automatic garage door transmitter in glove compartment of your car;
- Secure all obvious (and not so obvious) points of entry to your home. Pretend you are the burglar...stand outside your home and plan how you would get in; then install secure locks on all doors and windows;
- Lock up all ladders, ropes, or tools that could help a burglar gain entry;
- Keep all shrubbery trimmed near your doors and windows-don't provide concealment or climbing platforms for the burglar;

- Brightly illuminate all entrances, preferably with vandal-proof fixtures;
- Keep your grass cut, your leaves raked, etc., to indicate a well cared for and occupied home;
- Empty your mailbox or arrange to have it emptied as soon as mail is delivered;
- Install new locks when moving into an apartment or previously owned home;
- Keep extra keys out of sight and in a safe place; never hide a key outside--most hiding places are obvious to burglars;
- Avoid displaying valuable items near windows with open drapes or shades;
- Never leave a note on the door explaining why you are not at home;
- Never leave doors or windows unlocked when leaving home;
- Display only your last name on your nameplate or mailbox;
- Start a "buddy system" with you neighbors in order to watch each other's homes; watch for "movers" or "repair people" at a house where no one is home.

When Leaving Home for Several Days

- Don't cancel your paper or mail deliveries; ask that your neighbor pick them up every day;
- Leave a key with a friend or neighbor; ask that the house be checked periodically;
- Have the drapes periodically opened and closed; and have different lights turned on and off so the house appears occupied;
- Store all your valuables;
- Tell police when you are leaving and when you plan to return; they will check on your house periodically;
- Consider asking friends or relatives to live in your home while you are away;
- Leave a car in the driveway, or ask neighbors to park in it;
- Ask your neighbor to put some trash in your trash cans.

Despite precautions, if intruders are determined to enter and burglarize your home, they can probably do so. However, burglars usually seek the easiest target-and you can take steps to make your house less vulnerable.

Telephone Security

Daily Telephone Security

- Never give personal information (name, age, address, etc.) to a stranger on the telephone;
- Never let a stranger on the telephone know when you will or will not be home;
- Never let a stranger on the telephone know you are home alone; instruct babysitters never to tell anyone who calls that they are home alone with children;
- Teach children old enough to be left alone never to tell a stranger who telephones that parents are gone. Teach them to say, "My mom can't come to the phone now. May I take a message?"
- Credit card/Social Security #, etc. Do not give out a credit card or social security number to someone who you do not know or whom you did not call.

When Planning a Trip

- Consider having your telephone "put on vacation." (Notify the telephone company approximately two weeks before your trip, and arrangements will be made for an operator or a recording to state that your telephone is temporarily out of order each time it rings);
- Use "call forwarding" if available in your area. (Call forwarding can give callers the impression that residents are home when they are actually away, by transferring your incoming calls to another telephone number. Your local phone company can provide you with further information).

Confrontations with Intruders

Develop the habit of surveying your home as you approach it. If you note evidence that someone has broken in, DO NOT ENTER. Go to the nearest telephone and call the police or sheriff's department. Should you confront a burglar, the very first rule is: GET OUT OF HIS WAY!! Never get between a burglar and the exit, and never try to stop him. It may cost you your life!

If you are in your home and someone is prowling outside, make it appear that several people are at home. For example, call to someone, "Dan, there's something outside."

Call the police, and if it is dark, turn on the lights. If an intruder has already broken in, retreat and put other doors between the two of you. It is a good idea to have a deadbolt on an interior door. If you cannot get out, try to signal a neighbor by throwing something through a window; just the noise may frighten a burglar away.

If someone should enter your bedroom while you are in bed, pretend that you are asleep as long as he does not come near you.

If the intruder is armed, do what he says, and see that children do so as well. Remain calm-intruders generally want your property rather than your life.

Memorize a description of the intruder and write it down immediately after he has left; then call the police or your sheriff's department. Don't depend on memory.