



St. Johns County Sheriff's Office

"Taking Care of People"

Guide to Starting a Neighborhood Watch Program

A Neighborhood Watch Program is one of the most effective tools available for cutting down neighborhood crime. The St Johns County Sheriff's Office can help you get started!

A Neighborhood Watch Program

Anyone can be a victim of burglary or other crimes. Despite our best precautions, we often feel alone and vulnerable to crime. But there is a vital protection tool available – something residents in a community can do by banding together, in connection with local law enforcement agencies, to prevent crime before it happens.

Here's a community-based program that's been **proven** to deter crime. The National Neighborhood Watch Program, sponsored by the National Sheriff's Association since 1972, unites law enforcement agencies, local organizations and individual citizens in a community-wide effort to reduce residential crime. Thousands of these programs have been developed around the country, breaking down the isolation of neighbors as they work together and with law enforcement officers.

It is a remarkably successful anti-crime effort, as participants work together as a true community – neighbor looking out for neighbor.

- Any community resident can take part – young and old, single and married, renter or home owner.
- A few concerned residents, a community organization, or a law enforcement agency can spearhead the effort to organize a Neighborhood Watch.
- Members 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.
- You can form a Neighborhood Watch group around any geographical unit: a block, apartment building, park, business area, housing complex, office or marina.
- Watch groups are not vigilantes. They are extra eyes and ears for reporting crimes and helping neighbors.
- Neighborhood Watch helps build pride and serves as a springboard for efforts that address other community concerns, such as recreation for youth, child care, and affordable housing.

How to Get Started

Many of your neighbors may wish that a program like Neighborhood Watch already existed in their area, but don't know how to start one. They may not realize just how simple it is.

If you don't start a Neighborhood Watch program in your area, perhaps no one will. But once you take these first simple steps, you may be amazed at how easy it is to organize the program and what a difference it will make.

- Form a small planning committee. Decide on a date and a place for an initial neighborhood meeting.
- Contact your local law enforcement agency. Request that a crime prevention officer/deputy come to your meeting to discuss your community's problems and needs.
- Contact as many of your neighbors as possible and ask them if they would be willing to meet and organize a Neighborhood Watch group in your area.

Getting Organized

Once your program is beginning to get under way, there are several concrete steps you should take to make the organization solid and successful.

- Contact your local law enforcement agency for help in training members in home security and reporting skills, and for information on local crime patterns.
- Select a Neighborhood Watch coordinator and block captains who are responsible for organizing meetings and relaying information to members
- Recruit new members, keep up to date on new residents, and make special efforts to involve the elderly, working parents and young people.
- Work with local government or law enforcement to put up highly visible Neighborhood Watch signs and decals. These alert criminals that community members will watch and report their activities. Often, this is enough to discourage them!
- Work with police to organize citizen patrols, on foot or in vehicles, to monitor certain areas at assigned times or shifts. Lost children, stranded motorists, stray dogs, damaged street signs or traffic signals, wandering cattle, and auto accidents are often discovered by citizen patrols.

Neighbors Should Look For:

- Screaming or shouting for help
- Someone looking into windows of houses or parked cars
- Unusual noises
- Property being taken out of houses or buildings where no one is at home, or the business is closed
- Cars, vans or trucks moving slowly with no lights on or an apparent destination
- Anyone being forced into a vehicle
- A stranger running through private yards or alleyways
- A stranger sitting in a car or stopping to talk to a child
- Abandoned cars
- PLEASE NOTE: DO NOT INVESTIGATE THESE PROBLEMS ON YOUR OWN!!

Developing Citizen Awareness

Periodic meetings of your Neighborhood Watch group should be used to develop programs to heighten citizen awareness of and proper response to suspected or actual criminal activity. Speakers from law enforcement, as well as from a wide range of community organizations, can address such topics as:

- Recognizing suspicious activity and learning how to report it.
- Organizing victim assistance programs
- Developing neighborhood youth escort programs that can accompany older people and children on errands
- Organizing a crime stoppers program that allows individuals to offer information on crimes, anonymously
- Publishing a Neighborhood Watch newsletter with security tips and updates

Once you get started in organizing a Neighborhood Watch, there is virtually no limit to the innovative ways to combat crime and increase involvement of your community. Your neighborhood will not only become safer and more secure, but will have the added benefit of neighbors brought closer together, with opportunities to rekindle the sense of community that many areas of the country have lost over the years.

**A healthy, united community is one of the strongest deterrents to crime!
But it all has to start somewhere.
It can start with YOU.
Beginning TODAY!**

FOR MORE INFORMATION contact the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office Community Affairs Section at 904-824-8304.